



Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
December 16-23, 2013

Students make Cree Christmas cards for young offenders: Cards made by Grade 10 Saskatoon students will go to Kilburn Hall

[CBC News](#)

Dec 17, 2013 2:09 PM CT



Student Brandon Bedard and his teacher Belinda Daniels show off Cree Christmas cards. (CBC Saskatoon) One of the cards says Merry Christmas in Cree. Another has a buffalo symbol in bright colours. Inside there are legends and stories. These are the creations of several students in the grade 10 Cree language class at Mount Royal Collegiate.

The cards will be sent to young people in Saskatoon at Kilburn Hall.



Christmas Card with Cree story inside. Part of project by students at Mount Royal Collegiate in Saskatoon (CBC Saskatoon)

Teacher Belinda Daniels said she and her class were inspired after attending a large youth event called We Day in Saskatoon this past fall.. She said she reflected on injustices around the world and in her own community after hearing Chief Sean Atleo and Saskatchewan Tribal Chief Felix speak at the opening ceremonies.

"It made me think about the high incarceration rates, rates of people in jail that are First Nations and Aboriginal peoples."

Daniels and her class came up with an idea they could share with young people in detention, not just the cards, but the 'origin' stories written inside.



Photo of card with Merry Christmas written in Cree (CBC Saskatoon)

"They give people hope for a new beginning. Maybe they missed these stories when they were growing up."

Brandon Bedard is one of Daniels' students. He made a card that contains the legend of the buffalo hump inside. He doesn't know if he will hear back from the people who receive the cards. But he

said he hopes so.

"It is actually part of our culture to tell stories in the wintertime."

Belinda Daniels says the project also had an impact on her students by bringing them closer together with each other and their culture. One of her students made the bright red card with Merry Christmas written in Cree.

"You can tell she took pride in it, and was careful and methodical when writing it out." Daniels said the story told the creation of the Cree syllabic language.

"When students hear that they have their own language system they're mesmerized."

Crowd-funding raises over \$22,000 for rag-tag group of Inuit kids to go south and play hockey with pen-pals

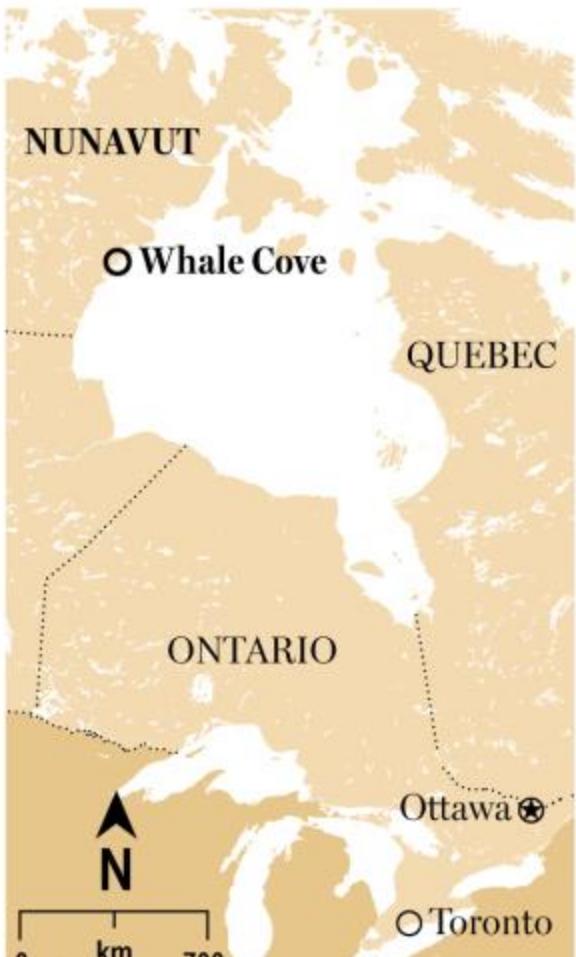
[National Post](#)

December 17, 2013

Joe O'Connor



Provided by Andy Mcfarlane The kids in Whale Cove just want to play hockey, even if it is almost -30.



Monday was not a good day for pond hockey in Whale Cove, Nunavut. The visibility was poor, due to a blizzard in the making, while a wind ripping in from the southwest like a buzz saw pushed the temperature to minus-30-something-below. Which sounds pretty awful, but isn't, not in comparison to the minus-60-something-deep-freeze the tiny Inuit community on the northwestern coast of Hudson Bay is expecting during Christmas week.

"It got so viciously cold here that the boys had to give up on the pond hockey," says Andy Mcfarlane, a teacher at the Inuglak School, explaining that the outdoor shinny season in Whale Cove commences in mid-October and concludes a few weeks and a few blizzards later.

"Our indoor rink opened up last week, and so the boys have been playing there, steady, ever since. You can talk hockey up here any day of the week."

The "boys," a rag-tag bunch of would-be Gretzkys, ages 12 to 17, do talk hockey, every day, while at school and at home and on the pond and at the rink and lately in their homework assignments for Mr. Mcfarlane.



The teacher is the new hockey nut in town, a transplant from Geraldton Composite High School, in Greenstone Ont., a municipality far to the south (though still north of Thunder Bay, Ont.). Provided by Andrew Mcfarlane Andrew Mcfarlane

Mr. Mcfarlane arranged for the Whale Cove kids to exchange handwritten letters with his former students. The correspondence between pen pals could have been about anything. It kept returning to hockey, however, a subject of common interest that led one bright young scribe to suggest that the Inuglak Whalers from Whale Cove should stop talking about hockey and head to Greenstone to actually play a few games.

"It was a great idea," Mr. Mcfarlane says. Great, in theory, and ridiculously expensive. Whale Cove is a one street town with one snowmobile trail leading out of it to Rankin Inlet, even further to the north. To get anywhere south requires flying, an expensive proposition.

But the teacher figured it was worth a try. Flights were booked on a credit card and a plea for \$20,000 in donations made on a crowd-funding website three weeks ago.

"In Whale Cove, Nunavut, hockey is what they do," Mr. Mcfarlane wrote as part of the appeal for cash. "We need your help."

Donations trickled in, mostly from family, friends and from Greenstone folks. Twenty bucks here. Another 50 there, the proverbial hockey helmet got passed around, sure enough, in slow and steady circles until word got out about some young Inuit hockey players in need and social media grabbed hold of a hockey cause. A Toronto TV station picked up the story. Theo Fleury, the old Calgary Flames hockey star, chimed in with a timely tweet. Money began rolling in from as far away as the Caribbean and from as close to home as a six-year-old kid donating his weekly allowance to help the Whalers hockey dream come true.



Provided by Andrew Mcfarlane Ice hockey at the top of Hudson's Bay

Businesses in Greenstone are kicking in with free hockey bags, sweaters, jackets, accommodation and tickets to see the Winnipeg Jets. Mr. Mcfarlane's mother, Cathy, is knitting team toques. Almost \$22,000 has been raised to date.

"It has been incredible seeing how complete strangers are willing to help these boys," Mr. Mcfarlane says.

"Maybe it has something to do with Christmas."

It is a wonderful thing, and so is playing the game in a traditional Inuit community where they make their own clothes, hunt for their own food and have a Zamboni that can be a little unreliable, especially when it is minus-60 and the parts freeze up and it has to stay parked for a stretch.



Provided by Andrew Mcfarlane Some of the kids highlighted by Mcfarlane.

When it does, the Inuglak Whalers will head to the school gym to practice, to hone their skills. They have a road trip to prepare for, their first. They are going to Greenstone for a week in March to play some city boys. They couldn't be more excited.

"They are going to get to see something and somewhere different," Mr. Mcfarlane says.

"They love hockey, and the really cool part is that they are going to get to meet their pen pals, face-to-face."

Inuit life expectancy lags as rest of Canada living longer: A Statistics Canada study shows Inuit life expectancy still trails that of the rest of the country, with self-inflicted injuries and smoking largely to blame

[Toronto Star](#)

December 18, 2013
Helen Branswell



TONDA MACCHARLES / *Toronto Star* file photo

A mother and child walk in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut. In Inuit regions of the country, women have a life expectancy of 72.8 years, compared to 81.3 years for women in the rest of the country.

A new study shows Inuit life expectancy still trails that of the rest of the country, with self-inflicted injuries and smoking largely to blame.

The Statistics Canada work compared life expectancy and cause of death data for the Inuit Nunangat area and the rest of the country from 1989 to 2008.

It found that life expectancy among people who live in the Inuit regions rose over the period.

Male life expectancy rose to 67.7 years from 63.5 years; among women, life expectancy rose to 72.8 years from 71.1 years

But in the rest of Canada, male life expectancy rose to 77.5 years from 74.1 years and among females it rose to 81.3 years from 79.7 years. Work

Among Inuit men, the main reason for the lower life expectancy was injury, particularly self-inflicted injury among males aged 15 to 24.

Among Inuit women, the gap in life expectancy was attributed to cancers and respiratory diseases, particularly chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

In fact, when causes of death related to smoking were grouped together, they accounted for about one-third of the difference between life expectancy among Inuit women and women in the rest of the country.

The study authors acknowledge there are some limitations to the work.

Vital statistic records did not routinely identify Inuit heritage during the period of study. So the authors used data from the whole of the Inuit Nunangat region — a technique which would have lumped in some non-Inuit people as well.

The study says Inuit people make up about 78 per cent of the population of the Inuit Nunangat, which is comprised of Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

Alberta First Nations mourn death of Cree band councillor

[Edmonton Journal](#)

December 13, 2013

Marty Klinkenberg



Willie Courtoreille

Alberta's aboriginal community is mourning the loss of Willie Courtoreille, an elder and longtime band councillor for the Mikisew Cree First Nation.

The older brother of Mikisew Cree Chief Steve Courtoreille, Willie

Courtoreille died Tuesday at age 73 in a crash on Highway 63 about 40 kilometres south of Fort McMurray.

The resident of Fort Chipewyan was en route to Edmonton on band business when his pickup truck collided with a northbound armoured vehicle. The armoured car's driver, 60-year-old Rod Whalen, died as well.

"Willie was my brother, my mentor and my friend," Steve Courtoreille said Friday. "We were colleagues on council for many years, but were brothers first."

"He has always been there to encourage me."

Remembered as a wise and caring man, Willie Courtoreille worked for Parks Canada for 30 years, giving interpretive tours in Wood Buffalo National Park. He had recently told his brother that he had decided not to run for another term as band councillor after serving for two decades.

"He was a very strong leader and straight shooter and he always wanted to make sure the place he came from was represented well," Steve Courtoreille said. "But he had finally reached the point where he had enough."

A funeral will be held for Courtoreille in Fort Chipewyan on Tuesday. Arrangements are pending, but his brother said it will likely be held in the tiny northern community's hall to accommodate the many guests.

"I have known Willie pretty much all of my life," said Allan Adam, chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. "He was a well-rounded person who contributed to the whole community."

"He loved what he did."

Married with children, grandchildren and great-great-grandkids, Courtoreille was described as a loving family man.

"He just loved kids," Steve Courtoreille said. "He was like a big teddy bear to all of them."

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Aboriginal fashion boutique urges shoppers to 'buy native': Beyond Buckskin promotes aboriginal designers and artists

[CBC News](#)

Dec 13, 2013 9:47 PM CT



Aboriginal fashion boutique urges shoppers to 'buy native'

An aboriginal fashion boutique is challenging shoppers this holiday season to buy from native designers and avoid cultural "knock-

offs" sold by popular clothing chains.

Beyond Buckskin is a U.S.-based website launched last year to sell clothing and accessories made by emerging and established aboriginal artists throughout North America, including Canada.

"The fashion industry is one of the hardest industries to break into, regardless of your background," Jessica Metcalfe, Beyond Buckskin's owner, told CBC News during a recent photo shoot in Winnipeg.



Jessica Metcalfe launched the Beyond Buckskin website last year to sell clothing and accessories made by emerging and established aboriginal artists throughout North America, including Canada. (Jillian Taylor/CBC)

Customers can find a wide variety of styles, from traditional to modern.

The site's holiday campaign aims to make it "insanely easy and enjoyable" for shoppers to "buy native" clothing and accessories for both men and

women.

"We can be that, you know, catalyst to bring it to a broader audience," Metcalfe said.

The goal of the Buy Native campaign is to encourage shoppers to buy directly from aboriginal artists, rather than get faux-aboriginal items that have been sold by big retailers.

Faux headdresses prompted complaints

H&M stores across Canada removed faux feather headdresses from their shelves earlier this year, following complaints that the items were offensive to aboriginal people who view headdresses as sacred.

In a similar case, Victoria's Secret apologized in November for putting a native-style headdress on a model for its annual fashion show.

Meanwhile, popular clothing retailers like Forever 21 and Urban Outfitters have been selling Navajo-like printed clothes.

Metcalfe said selling cultural knockoffs is offensive and promotes stereotypes about aboriginal people.

"I work with artists and designers who are very connected to their communities. They know what items should never be for sale," she said.

Instead, the artists involved with Beyond Buckskin take aspects of their culture and make it wearable and appreciated by everyone, she added.

While some shoppers in Winnipeg said they would buy directly from aboriginal artists, some noted that knockoffs tend to be cheaper than the real thing.

"That's the way of the future. A lot of businesses are doing that," said shopper Cheryl Post.

U.S. First Nations man threatened with deportation after 37 years in Canada

[Metro News](#)

December 13, 2013

Luke Simcoe



Contributed Richard Jerman (back), poses with his family on Penelakut Island.

The sudden arrest and possible deportation of a U.S. man living for decades on a B.C. First Nation has stirred up painful memories in a community still coming to terms with the legacy of residential schooling.

On Wednesday, Canada Border Services agents showed up unannounced on [Penelakut Island](#) and placed 60-year-old Richard Jerman into custody.

Although born in California to a Miwok Indian father and Mexican mother, Jerman has been living with the Penelakut tribe for 37 years. His wife, Maria George, hails from the community and together they have four children and 14 grandchildren.

"Everybody at home is in shock," said Jerman's eldest daughter, Carmen George. "He's part of the community. He's done so much and built such strong relationships here."

According to his family, Jerman ran a community garden on the island, and mentored youth, teaching them how to catch and smoke fish.

Carmen, her mother and her sister Loretta Sue are currently in Vancouver, where Jerman is being held at an immigration facility. They're in talks with a lawyer and are helping co-ordinate support for Jerman.

"We've been torn apart," Carmen said. "They didn't just tear my dad away from the community, they've torn my mom away from her grandchildren. They've torn us away from our jobs."

Carmen said no one has been more affected by Jerman's plight than her mother. A residential school survivor, Maria was devastated to see government officials come to her home and take her husband away from his family.

"It's bringing back memories of when she was torn away from home and sent to a residential school," Carmen said, choking back tears.

According to the Constitution Act and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, First Nations people can travel freely across the Canada-U.S. border. However, Jerman is not officially a status Indian, nor has he applied for Canadian citizenship despite living in the country for almost four decades.

"I'm not sure why," Carmen said. "We never really thought about it. We never talked about it."

Although Penelakut is located outside her riding, Green Party Leader and Saanich-Gulf Islands MP Elizabeth May is asking the government to intervene.

"The punishment doesn't fit the crime. It's not like he's a threat to anyone," May said. "He's been here since he was a kid. He's been married for decades and has a family. And he's an important part of a community that has been through so much pain."

May is asking the immigration review board not to rush the case and to return Jerman to his family for Christmas. If the board does decide to deport Jerman, the Green leader said she's prepared to "beg" Minister of Public Safety Steven Blaney to reconsider.

Carmen and her family hope it doesn't come to that.

"There's 14 grandchildren sitting at home, and another on the way. All they want for Christmas is for their papa to be home where he belongs," she said.

Healing a life of hate and violence

[Calgary Herald](#)

December 14, 2013

Sherri Zickefoose



Tiffany, 27 is a client at the Awo Taan Parent Link Centre. "... I feel motivated and confident. I can change," she said. Photograph by: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

At 27, Tiffany has known a lifetime of violence from growing up on the gang-riddled reserves of the Samson Cree Nation.

But she was part of the problem. A metal plate and seven screws are holding her ankle together - the physical wreckage caused by kicking down doors. As a former enforcer for one of Hobbema's deadly drug-fuelled gangs, Tiffany became a fearsome warrior just trying to survive.

She spent years shaking down residents for money and beating rivals. She took the rap for crimes, sparing higher ranking male gangsters jail time.

Even after her own brother was shot in the neck during feuding over the lucrative drug trade on Hobbema's reserves, Tiffany continued on a path of violence. It wasn't until her young daughter was taken away by the province that Tiffany says she began to question her life of crime.

"Karma hits you. All the bad I did, the drugs are killing off my community. And the money doesn't last," she said. "That's what I don't want for my daughter."

Motivated to regain custody of her child, Tiffany left the reserve and ended up at Calgary's Awo Taan Healing Lodge.

The agency is guided by native cultural values and traditional teachings. Since August, Tiffany has been taking part in Awo Taan's weekly healing circle and parenting program.

Exposing struggling parents to spiritual ceremonies and support circles with elders help them reconnect with their culture. Awo Taan's Parent Link Centre provides high-quality, comprehensive, accessible, community-based programs that comply with provincewide standards. What makes it special is how it responds to the needs of families and parents like Tiffany.

"We offer a sense of community.

A cookie-cutter parenting program is not going to work," said Samantha Green, the healing lodge and parent centre program co-ordinator.

Awo Taan's Parent Link strives to help families develop healthy lifestyles. They focus on nurturing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual growth. And according to Tiffany, it's working.

"Coming here makes me stronger. I feel motivated and confident. I can change," she said.

It hasn't been easy. "There's a lot of hate on me for leaving (my reserve). I was one of the first in my community to go up against a gang. It scared me at first," she said.

In her quest to regain custody of her three-year-old daughter, Tiffany abstains from drinking and drugs, and is learning new skills to be a better parent.

"The workers make me feel comfortable, this is a safe place," she said.

For now, Tiffany is aiming to finish school. She dropped out in Grade 9. She sees herself training to become a hairdresser. She wants to be a good example for others back home. She wants her daughter back.

"I want to get my story out there. I want to make my community more aware. They see that I've changed. That was the old me."

It's not just parents who benefit from Awo Taan. Children are a big part of the programming.

"There's always something here for your children. We're comfortable here," said Roanna, a 46-yearold mother of two who fled to Awo Taan from an abusive home on a nearby reserve.

Their dilapidated home was no place for children. The vandalized windows were broken, there was no heat.

"It wasn't livable. I had to leave," she said. "Everything was broken. I just gave up on everything."

Roanna lost custody of her children for six months as she battled alcoholism. Now sober, she says Awo Taan has made a difference for her daughters.

"Before, my kids didn't get to do anything. Now, they're more outgoing, they are treated right. They really like it here and it keeps my kids in a cultural place."

Her daughters, ages eight and nine, were overjoyed to fly to Disneyland for a day recently as part of Dreams Take Flight. The national non-profit organization takes disadvantaged children on a trip-of-a-lifetime.

"I wouldn't have been able to afford it because I'm a single mother."

As Roanna makes connections with elders and support workers, she says their friendship has been invaluable.

"There are people who have been through what I've been through. They don't judge me because I've had a hard life."

For all the good Awo Taan has done over the past 20 years, it is now experiencing growing pains. A new facility with modern space for programming would help it keep pace. But money is tight.

"We are stretched to our capacity. We have full family loads for each worker," said Green.

To call Awo Taan a no-frills operations is an understatement. With a budget of \$345,000 a year, its true costs run closer to \$500,000. The charity is grateful for donations of food, cultural enrichment programs, Tiny Tots, and cost-sharing of programs.

Ideas to expand programming include focusing on children's healing circles, naming ceremonies, and one-on-one sessions.

The dreams are worth pursuing, staff say. "We offer a sense of family here," said Green. "It's non-judgmental. We rarely use the word clients. These are mothers. Staff can act in a grandmother role if people are missing that. It's really about a sense of belonging."

All donations to the Calgary Herald Christmas Fund go directly to our 2013 sponsored social agencies, including Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society.

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The Oilsands, Part 5: First Nations struggle to save traditions while profiting from boom

[Edmonton Journal](#)

December 15, 2013

Marty Klinkenberg



Traditional instructor Lily Marcel lays frozen caribou legs in the sun to thaw. The dry meat making workshop, held in Fort Chipewyan, was put on by the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in September 2013 to teach residents aboriginal traditions. Photograph by: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal

FORT CHIPEWYAN — On a hill overlooking Lake Athabasca, the big water that sustained their forefathers for 9,000 years, a dozen residents of Fort

Chipewyan gather in a teepee with the legs and shoulders of a freshly killed caribou before them.

Outside, gulls dive and swoop and cry in a breeze that rustles the flaps and bends the poles. Inside, Mary and Lily Marcel clutch razor-sharp knives and begin leading a class in the dying art of drying meat. There are elders and a baby, coddled and cuddled in the arms of one adult and the next, and several generations in-between.

All smiles, Cassandra Marcel watches — and then carefully slices the skin on the leg of a caribou, shot days earlier during the fall hunt, for the first time.

“I think I am going to have to change my nail polish,” says Cassandra, 23.

Established by fur traders in 1788, Fort Chipewyan is Alberta’s oldest settlement and one of its most remote. Sitting in the northeast corner of the province, it is reachable only by air or a lengthy boat ride up the Athabasca River or ice road in the winter. Nearly 300 kilometres north of Fort McMurray, it is home to roughly 1,200 people, predominantly Métis and members of the Athabasca Chipewyan and Mikisew Cree First Nations.

As an aboriginal community downstream from the oilsands, it shares a quandary with other First Nations communities blessed and cursed by their proximity to the world’s largest stash of bitumen: They are simultaneously prospering and in a life-and-death struggle to retain their cultural identity.

PROSPERITY, BUT AT WHAT COST?

Unemployment is virtually non-existent in Fort Chipewyan, incomes are rising, and a seniors’ care home with a sweat lodge is under construction. On the flip side, traditions practised for centuries are being lost as band members are lured away by the promise of the oilpatch.

“There has to be a balance between the oilsands and tradition,” Greg Marcel, a councillor with the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, says, building a fire with branches of diamond willow to smoke and dry caribou meat. “If you make too much money, you lose your traditions. If you try to live strictly off the land, you can’t afford it.”



Photo: Greg Marcel builds a teepee during a dry meat making workshop in Fort Chipewyan on Sept. 13, 2013. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

As recently as a few decades ago, nearly 80 per cent of the residents in Fort Chipewyan lived off the land. But activity in the oilsands is migrating north, swallowing up resources and, for First

Nations, stifling a way of life. It is true in Fort Chipewyan, farther south in Fort McKay, and on other reserves around the province.

"There is nothing black and white about what is happening," says John O'Connor, one of two doctors serving native communities in Alberta's northeastern corridor. "There is no denying industry's arrival has brought jobs, and that socioeconomic circumstances have improved immensely.

"But it is a dilemma for communities that are losing ground, literally, and losing touch with their culture. In the end it is almost a choice of 'Do I die by starvation or do I die by poisoning?'

"If industry shuts down, they have nothing. If it continues, they are right in the middle of it. It is a really tough situation that indigenous people in Canada are in."

In Fort Chipewyan, elders are staging free workshops in an attempt to sustain traditions, including offering instruction in moose hide tanning, fish drying, beadwork, and drying meat.

"My job is to put programs together that will help bring back our culture," says Roxanne Marcel, a former Mikisew Cree chief who now works for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. "It is a challenge, and will always be a challenge.

"There is still interest, but there is a gap."

'WE WERE ANTI-DEVELOPMENT FOR A LONG TIME'

Raised by his grandparents, Jim Boucher grew up in Fort McKay, playing hockey on the Athabasca River with a stick fashioned from the curved branch of a birch tree and skates forged out of shoes with files attached to the bottom.

"It was a good life, but we had nothing, really," Boucher says as he sits on a couch in his corner office overlooking the river on the Fort McKay First Nation, where he has served as chief for 23 of the last 27 years. "You had to use your imagination and improvise if you wanted to play.

"We slid up and down hills, ran dog teams, went hunting, set up snares. We would swim all day, then swim out to a net in the river, take out a fish and go back to shore and cook it for dinner.

"That way we didn't have to go home and get heck for being gone all day and forgetting about our chores."

With the exception of attending high school in Edmonton, Boucher, 57, has spent his entire life in Fort McKay. The hamlet 58 km north of Fort McMurray is a perfect example of a community that is both flourishing and under siege.

Impoverished and without running water or electricity in Boucher's youth, Fort McKay is booming. The band is building dozens of homes to be rented to members at below-market prices, and construction has started on a kindergarten-to-Grade 12 school, a youth centre, a long-term care facility for elders, a church, and an amphitheatre with seating for 1,800.

In a community of 800 Dene, Cree and Métis, only a handful are unemployed. As long as they are able, residents are put to work for the Fort McKay Group of Companies, eight limited partnerships that are controlled by the band and provide services to the oil and gas industry.



Photo: Fort McKay First Nation Chief Jim Boucher. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

The group of companies founded in 1986 is directed by Boucher and ranks among Canada's most successful aboriginal business ventures, with annual revenue exceeding \$100 million.

"I think our community is benefiting from oilsands development, but we do so because there are no other economic opportunities," Boucher says.

Established in 1820 by the Hudson Bay Company, Fort McKay was devastated when an anti-fur campaign resulted in a ban on animals caught in leghold traps in the mid-1980s. At the time, local trappers were earning as much as \$1,000 for a lynx pelt and \$80 for a beaver.

"It was a very lucrative economy for our people," Boucher says. "We were devastated economically."

Forced to explore other options, the community focused on the energy industry gaining a foothold in the region. A handful of companies had established mining operations in the countryside surrounding Fort McKay, despite objections from the First Nation.

"We were anti-development for a long time, but at the end of the day it came down to the point where government would approve the projects and our rights were diminished by virtue of what they were doing," Boucher says. "Gradually, we came to recognize we had no other option but to develop an economy of our own.

"I was forced to be in this position because of history, and the need for oil within certain markets of the world."

The First Nation now derives 98 per cent of its revenue from the oilsands, but it does not come without a cost.

"When I was young, we were not really subject to government, other than in the sense that they came and took children away and put them in residential schools," Boucher says. "I was lucky enough to be taken in by my grandparents at a very young age, and we used to travel up and down the river with a canoe. We would walk in the fall. In winter, we would use toboggans with dogs.

"It was a beautiful time in my life."

As a teen, Boucher learned how to trap from his grandfather, setting up a line at Mildred Lake, south of Fort McKay. It is there that Syncrude erected a bitumen plant with a capacity of nearly 300,000 barrels per day.

"I put some snares out one day and went back the next day to check them," Boucher recalls. "Suddenly, I came to a huge clearing and all of my snares were gone."

"That was how we were introduced to the oil companies. They came in here and tore down the forest without any discussion."

BEGRUDGING INVOLVEMENT IN THE OILSANDS INDUSTRY

For Alberta, and arguably all of Canada, the road to a robust economy is paved with bitumen. In terms of oil reserves, there are 177 billion barrels of oil recoverable from Alberta's oilsands. More conventional crude accounts for only 4.1 billion barrels of the Canadian reserves.

Discovered by aborigines who used the substance to seal seams on their canoes, bitumen oozes naturally through rocky cliffs along the steep river banks in northern Alberta and pools along the shorelines.

The sheer volume of the resource makes it a dominant player in the drive to replenish North America's dwindling supply of traditional crude.

Transported by pipelines at the pace of a brisk walk, the thick bitumen slurry is refined and then turned into an array of products as diverse as gasoline, ballpoint pens, lipstick and hockey pucks.

The result is a windfall, with new oilsands developments expected to contribute \$2.1 trillion to the Canadian economy in the next 25 years. In Alberta, over the same period, \$350 billion is expected to be accrued in royalties alone.



Photo: A panoramic view of hundreds of crosses and grave markers with dates spanning centuries in the cemetery in Fort Chipewyan. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

For decades, major players like Suncor, Syncrude, Shell and Canadian Natural Resources have invested heavily in the oilsands, but it is more recently that First Nations have become begrudgingly involved.

The Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association now has 101 majority-owned companies among its members, ranging from native awareness training groups to multimillion-dollar construction firms. In the Wood Buffalo region, which includes Fort McMurray and a majority of the oilsands, aboriginal companies performed more than \$1 billion in contract work for industry in 2011.

"In Fort McKay, we are kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place," says Dayle Hyde, the First Nation's communications director. "If we had refused to participate in the oilsands, we would have become an island in the midst of development. We would not be much farther ahead than we were in the 1980s."

LAWSUITS AND ROCK STARS AS FIRST NATIONS FIGHT BACK

A battle is being waged over the oilsands on many fronts.

In the last two years, Alberta Premier Alison Redford has visited Washington and New York to lobby on behalf of industry, and this fall Redford dispatched then-environment minister (now Energy minister) Diana McQueen on a similar tour of European capitals.

But as hard as government has been pushing, First Nations have been pushing back. And they are taking to the international stage.

In October, George Poitras, a former chief of the Mikisew Cree, travelled to the Netherlands and U.K. to raise awareness of the environmental effects of oilsands on aboriginal communities. Shortly before that, Neil Young lashed out against the oilsands during a news conference in Washington that made splashy headlines.

The veteran Canadian singer got involved through Eriel Deranger, the Chipewyan band's fiery spokeswoman.

On Dec. 9, 2013, Young announced he is doing a series of concerts to help bankroll the First Nation's legal challenges against expansion in the oilsands.

The native band's oilsands campaign co-ordinator, Deranger comes by activism honestly — her family was forcibly removed from its trapline in Saskatchewan by a mining company.



Photo: Eriel Deranger is a communications consultant for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

Although she fields queries from people with environmental concerns from all over the world, Deranger was skeptical when

contacted by someone claiming to be an acquaintance of Young's.

After a flurry of emails, however, she confirmed the connection, and planned a visit to the oilsands for the rock-and-roll legend.

In September, Young and actress Daryl Hannah, who was arrested outside the White House in February while protesting the Keystone XL Pipeline, drove 2,800 km from San Francisco to Fort McMurray in a 1959 Lincoln the musician has retrofitted to run on electricity generated by an ethanol engine.

Upon their arrival, Deranger hopped in the back, strapped one of her children into a car seat, and narrated a tour, with Young at the wheel and Hannah riding shotgun.

During a stop in Janvier at the Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, the singer brandished a guitar and sang Heart of Gold with local native drummers accompanying him.

"He is a really genuine, down-to-earth, guy," Deranger says, promising Young's participation as an oilsands agitator is not over.



Photo: Actress Daryl Hannah, second from left, and musician Neil Young, centre, with Dene Chief Allan Adam, left, during a visit to the Chipewyan Prairie First Nation in September. Credit: Joey Podlubny Photography.

A former treaty land entitlement claims researcher for the Saskatchewan First Nations, Deranger was

hired as a communications consultant by the Athabasca Chipewyan in 2011. In that capacity, she travels regularly between her home in Edmonton and Fort Chipewyan, in and around where her father was born and raised.

As a child, her dad sent her to Fort Chipewyan to spend time with family, and she discovered the Dene heritage she so fiercely protects today.

Absent from northern Alberta for 10 years after her parents separated, Deranger returned in her early 20s and was troubled by what she found.

"I remembered driving from Fort McMurray to Fort McKay as a child, and it was basically Syncrude, Suncor and I think one other company in a little strip," says Deranger, now in her mid-30s. "There were rivers and trees, and the boreal forest was still relatively abundant in the area."

When she drove along the same stretch a decade later, tears streamed down her face.

"I looked out the window and everything I had known and seen as a child was gone," she says. "It was at that moment that I realized I had to do something."

Over the last two years, as the band has challenged oilsands projects proposed within its traditional territory, Deranger has become its eloquent mouthpiece.

"We talk about the economic boom, but we are not taking actual side costs into consideration," she says. "On the First Nations a lot of people are benefiting, but it is also creating an incredible polarization between people in poverty and those employed in the oilsands."

"There are many people who choose not to work for the oil and gas industry for political and personal reasons, and they often pay the price."

CONNECTION BETWEEN HEALTH AND INDUSTRY?

John O'Connor had never met a First Nations person before coming to Alberta in 1993.

A doctor in Ireland, he immigrated to Nova Scotia in 1984, and moved to Fort McMurray to practise medicine nine years after that.

The general practitioner became interested in native culture and jumped at the chance in late 1993 when asked to serve the community in Janvier, 120 km to the south.

Four years later, he received an invitation to see patients in Fort McKay, and three years after that he began flying to Fort Chipewyan to treat patients there.

"I think being Irish, the Irish are always on the side of the underdogs," O'Connor says on a cool fall evening, stethoscope wrapped around his neck. "I think I would die of suffocation if I was to come back into an office in a city setting and see patients who are mostly suffering illnesses related to the choices they have made, as opposed to people from outlying areas that in many instances have nothing."

"You feel like you are actually doing something good."

It was while working in Fort Chipewyan that O'Connor, the former medical examiner in the region, observed an unusual frequency in cancer. He ruffled feathers by going public with his concerns in 2006 and then fought with health authorities who refuted his claims and threatened to take his license away.

A 2009 study released by the Alberta Cancer Board found that Fort Chipewyan had a 30-per-cent higher cancer rate than expected, however, and the complaints lodged against O'Connor, including one for raising undue alarm, were dropped.



Photo: Dr. John O'Connor stands outside the hospital in Fort McMurray in September 2013. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

O'Connor is disappointed no subsequent review has been undertaken to determine the cause of the elevated cancer rates. A study promised by government was abandoned after residents in Fort Chipewyan objected when the province moved to include industry representatives on an oversight committee.

"We still don't know if there is any connection between health issues in the communities and development in the oilsands," says O'Connor, who works in the emergency room at the Northern Lights Regional Health Centre in Fort McMurray on weekends, evaluating patients to see if they require hospitalization. "At this point, it isn't my duty or even the duty of public health to say there is a connection. Government and industry should have to prove there isn't. That is the way it works everywhere else in the world.

"Given the toxins and the illnesses identified, I suspect you can join the dots. You don't want to join the dots, but that's the way to go about it. You study, do the appropriate testing and be rigorous and scientific about it.

"The tragedy of all this is that not one public health physician is asking anything, based on the precautionary principle even. The silence is deafening."

CONFICTED PAST, CONFUSING PRESENT

An elder on the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Alice Rigney was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011. Like everyone else in Fort Chipewyan, she can easily string together a list of family members and friends who have also been stricken.

"It seems like every year someone here is diagnosed with cancer," she says, sitting beside a fire in front of her house on a fall evening where northern lights streak brilliantly across the sky. "I think the community feels industry has something to do with the sickness, but you can't say for sure without an intensive health study.

"It needs to be done."



Photo: Fort Chipewyan residents John and Alice Rigney pose for a photo on the shore of Lake Athabasca in Fort Chipewyan on Sept. 13, 2013.
Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

Born in Fort Chipewyan, Rigney has engaged in a lifelong struggle to retain her culture.

At the age of five, she was taken from her parents and placed in a residential school where she was prohibited from speaking in Dene, her native tongue.

"Most of us left the system not knowing our language or culture, and not proud of who we were," says Rigney, 62. "We were called savages by the nuns and sexually abused by the priests.

"For a while, I hated their God. What kind of a God would abuse little children?"

Taught to be embarrassed by her heritage, Rigney grew apart from her parents. Only later, as an adult, did she reconnect with them, after learning Dene at the suggestion of her grandmother. Her father, born in a teepee, spoke no English.

"When I learned to speak the language, my identity was given back to me," says Rigney, one of only a few people in Fort Chipewyan able to speak Dene fluently.

Nearly wiped out by famine and epidemic, Fort Chipewyan has seen more than its share of grief.

Its haunting little cemetery is dotted with row upon row of graves of children who succumbed to influenza and smallpox. Subsistence trapping has been poor since water levels in Lake Athabasca fell dramatically as the result of a B.C. Hydro dam project in 1967, and pickerel and whitefish with deformities have been caught since 1982, when a fuel spill shut down commercial fishing in the lake for two years.

"There is no trapping and nobody wants to eat polluted fish, so what else, other than going to work for industry, are people going to do?" Rigney says. "It's a hard situation, a catch-22."

A mother of four with 10 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, Rigney laments the fact that family members are leaving Fort Chipewyan for the oilpatch. Unlike other First Nations communities, until very recently, only a handful of people opted to work for oil and gas companies. The number has grown from seven a half-dozen years ago to around 70 today.

"There was a comment said to a friend of mine that he was helping to destroy the land by working at industry," Rigney says. "It made him feel bad. When you have young ones, and the only thing you can do is drive big trucks, you do it.

"He doesn't have a choice."

Alice's husband of 17 years, John Rigney moved to Fort Chipewyan in 1972 from a farm near Edmonton. He had no intention of staying, but says, "I have never had the willpower to leave."

A non-native, with the exception of a few interruptions he has worked as a manager for the Mikisew Cree or Athabasca Chipewyan First Nations since 1982.

"When I came here, I felt I had been betrayed and lied to all of my life," Rigney, 63, says. "I had never met native people, except for maybe a couple of individuals, and I had been told that Canada was a land of freedom and equality.

"Then I came here and I saw oppression and poverty beyond anything I ever imagined possible. I saw families who had their children taken away for 50 years, young people who didn't know how to raise kids because they had no family model, and 90-per-cent unemployment, not because people were lazy, but because industry and governments had changed the environment."

In 1994, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation started a support-services company with a contract at Syncrude and five employees. Now it operates six companies, has seven joint ventures and a workforce of 1,400 people in fields as diverse as industrial cleaning, manufacturing, steel fabrication, road building, environmental monitoring, camp management and catering.

Thanks to its growing wealth, the band is considering offering business incentives to entrepreneurs, implementing home ownership and renovation incentive programs, and augmenting health and educational services provided by government.

In many ways the community has never had it so good — or so bad.

"The oilsands developments have provided opportunities for people and First Nations governments are poised to become really prosperous and independent," says John Rigney. "At the same time, there has been no migration into Fort Chip and a substantial migration out for jobs, and there is a great fear of harmful pollution in our water, air, wildlife, berries and gardens.

"Really, I wish Edmonton and Calgary had all of the oilsands. I'd be real happy if they dug up the Calgary-Edmonton highway for 50 kilometres on either side just as they are doing to the Athabasca River. I would advertise it as the most beautiful development Alberta ever had because that is how they advertise the oilsands as they are destroying northeast Alberta in the process.

"You can't mine out 4,000 square kilometres and have no impact. You will never make me believe that it won't cause hundreds of years of pollution for people downstream."

McKAY 'AN ADVOCATE FOR RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT'

After 20 years of coexisting with industry without much discord, the Fort McKay First Nation filed an objection this spring over a project in northeastern Alberta.

The band appeared before the province's Energy Resources Conservation Board and asked for a 20-km buffer zone to protect its Moose Lake Reserve from a 250,000 barrel-per-day bitumen facility.

Ultimately, the board rejected Fort McKay's argument that the development would infringe on activities band members have enjoyed at Moose Lake for more than 100 years.

The outcome disappointed the First Nation, which has since been granted leave to appeal. At its closest point, the steam-assisted gravity drainage plant would come within 1200 metres of the reserve where band members go canoeing, fishing and hunting, and teach courses to youth on native culture.

"We are engaging a number of people with respect to how we can save the lake from any impingement or destruction," Boucher says. "Our people feel it is a very special place.

"I am thinking of building a cabin there, perhaps where my grandfather had his. I think it is the only place on this planet where I can reconnect with his spirit."



Photo: An aerial view of Fort McKay on June 18, 2013. Credit:

Dayle Hyde, the First Nation's communications director, understands the band's opposition has raised eyebrows. The First Nation also recently pulled out of an industry-sponsored environmental monitoring program, calling it a

"frustrating and futile" process.

"There is a perception out there that if you are a First Nation and you haven't built your economy, then you are leaching off government," says Hyde, the daughter of

the late Dorothy McDonald, Alberta's first woman to be elected chief. "With us, we have built our economy but there is still a perception that we shouldn't have a say in the environmental impacts of the oilsands because we have participated.

"But I think Fort McKay has always been an advocate for responsible development."

Like her mother, who served as chief from 1980-86 and 1990-92, Hyde sees good and bad in resource development. Dorothy McDonald recognized the benefits enough to establish the Fort McKay Group of Companies, but another time she planted a teepee in the middle of the road to prevent logging trucks from speeding through the community.

"Recognizing Fort McKay has benefited from development, we still need areas to be able to practice traditional activities because it is part of who we are," Hyde, 33, says. "One of the hardest things about loving Fort McKay and seeing where it is today is seeing how much the landscape has changed.

"Fort McKay always had a natural beauty, even though it was close to oilsands development, but now it is harder to pretend we aren't surrounded.

"You can see it and hear it and smell it every day."

LIFE IN FORT CHIP

There are approximately 23,000 aboriginals living near Alberta's oilsands, with 18 First Nations and six Métis settlements in the region.

Fort Chipewyan, headquarters to both the Athabasca Chipewyan and Mikisew Cree bands, is among its most endearing places.

There is a community school and a hockey rink, two bed and breakfasts, a picturesque wharf, an airport with a double-wide trailer that serves as a terminal, two gas bars, a couple of churches and restaurants, and a museum where it is possible to acquire a native cookbook with recipes for smoked muskrat, beaver and sauerkraut and jellied moose nose.

Groceries are brought in by ice road, barge and air, and they are extraordinarily expensive at the one and only Northern Store: \$15.99 for a 600-gram block of cheese, \$12.39 for a four-litre jug of milk, \$10.35 for a one-litre carton of orange juice, \$6.89 for a two-litre bottle of Coke, \$5.99 for a head of cauliflower — and \$189.99 for a coyote pelt.

A sign along the two-lane road that leads from the airstrip into town advertises that it is 4,098 km to Ottawa and 1,891 km to Vancouver — but they might as well be a million miles away.

"I love this place," Alice Rigney says after fussing in her kitchen all day, pickling habanero peppers and beets from her garden and filling jars with homemade raspberry jam. "My husband and I had a chance to move to Fort McMurray but I think it took us about five seconds to realize it was not for us.

"Fort Mac has absolutely nothing that I want."

Big Ray Ladouceur is a 71-year-old with grey hair and creases around his eyes. His grandmother was a medicine woman and his father was a fisherman, musher and trapper.

Married for 47 years, he jokes about his wife, Nancy, saying, "I set a trap and caught a Saskatchewan girl."

A fisherman since he was old enough to haul a net, he laughs about the day he left his favourite spot, only to have one of his friends, Horton Flett, stay and haul in a 102-pound lake trout that destroyed \$1,100 worth of gear.

"I miss the beauty of everything we had," Ladouceur says. "It used to be that we could drink the water right off the rivers. Today, I make tea from water in the Athabasca River and it leaves a black scum around the cup."

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THEIR ROOTS

A pile of frozen caribou legs, thighs and shoulders lies in the grass defrosting beside the teepee where natives from Fort Chipewyan are gathered for the drying-meat workshop.

Inside, the participants watch intently as elders skin the animals and begin cutting thin slices of meat that will be hung over sticks in an adjacent teepee where smoke is rising from a fire.

"I am a little afraid to try," one woman says.

"It's OK, I brought Band-Aids," another chirps cheerfully.

Hands bloody, Cassandra Marcel and her younger cousin, Raylene Gibot, work slowly and steadily as they skin and cut the caribou they are learning how to dry. Raylene's one-year-old son, Rayelle, sleeps peacefully in a stroller beside her.



Photo: Raylene Gibot hangs caribou meat during a dry meat making workshop in Fort Chipewyan on Sept. 13, 2013. Credit: Ryan Jackson, Edmonton Journal.

"There, I did it!" Cassandra suddenly shouts jubilantly. "There is hope for me yet."

Then she holds up a slice of caribou full of tiny holes like Swiss cheese.

"Does anyone have a needle and thread?" she asks. "I think I have to sew my meat back together."

Around the teepee, the banter continues as participants learn a tradition passed down for hundreds of years. After it is cut, the caribou meat is smoked for six hours, dried for eight hours and then pounded to tenderize it.

"Dry meat and fish are a delicacy to us," Greg Marcel says. "Even people who move from here to Fort McMurray and Edmonton phone home and ask if we have any. All of it will be gone in two or three days."

Born in Fort Chipewyan, Marcel was taught to trap by his grandfather. For 20 years he worked in the oilpatch, now he is retired and helps to teach others their native culture.

"Over the last few years we have not been living off the land like we used to, and our traditions are being lost," he says. "We are doing this to make sure we keep it alive."

He doesn't live like his ancestors, but he appreciates from whence he came.

"Environmentalists look at our land and say it is beautiful, nice country," he says. "But we look at it a different way. We like to fish, we like to hunt, we like picking the berries."

"This is what has sustained us for thousands of years."

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CBC Aboriginal aims to keep the conversation going

[CBC News](#)

Dec 16, 2013 2:40 PM ET



This family in Attawapiskat, Ont., lived in a temporary shelter that was evacuated after a recent fire. The related story posted on our site received a lot of negative, even racist, comments. (Danny Kresnyak)

It's been one week

since we launched CBC Aboriginal and it's been quite a week.

We've been getting a lot of feedback - and we're reading all of it - your tweets, your Facebook posts, your emails and especially, your comments.

The comments section can sometimes elicit divisive, negative, even racist sentiments.

Especially on Aboriginal stories.



Priscilla Rose's story gave a different point of view about life in Attawapiskat. (Rosie Koostachin)

Occasionally, we decide to close the comments section on a story because the response can be overwhelming and difficult to moderate but for every story that we've posted at CBC Aboriginal - we've kept the comments section open.

Why?

It may sound idealistic (and that is definitely something I've been accused of) but we really want to encourage discussion about Aboriginal issues in Canada.

I'm not talking about racist or hateful comments. We don't tolerate them.

They have no place on our site and we are working hard to ensure they don't make it past our moderators. We encourage you to read our [submission guidelines](#).

We want you to know that this is a very high priority for us.

'It's our hope that through dialogue, we can address some all too prevalent myths and misconceptions — about taxes, free education and life on a reserve.' - *Connie Walker, CBC Aboriginal reporter*

But the comments that aren't defamatory or insulting but still show the lack of understanding of Aboriginal people in Canada — I think it's important those comments stay up.

It's our hope that through dialogue, we can address some all too prevalent myths and misconceptions — about taxes, free education and life on a reserve.

It's obvious people want to talk about these issues. Ten stories that we posted on our site last week generated over a thousand comments.

And our research tells us that a large part of our audience reads that section.

"A recent InCanada online panel study, which sampled 1,020 Canadians, suggests that 77% of online Anglo Canadians read the comments section at least some of the time. That number is even higher for CBC.CA visitors, with 82% stating that they have read the comments section at least some of the time."

Source: InC anada Panel Survey (Dates in field: Nov 4-6th, 2013, Anglo Canadians 18+)

I think that by closing the comments section, we're closing the door on an opportunity. An opportunity for meaningful conversation that can deepen the understanding between our communities.

We posted two stories about Attawapiskat last week.



Richard Spence in the burnt out emergency shelter on Attawapiskat First Nation. (Danny Kresnyak)

[The story by Richard Spence about the housing crisis](#) received a ton of comments, a lot of them negative and some were even racist and we removed them as quickly as possible.

But the other [story by Priscella Rose about life in Attawapiskat](#) and why it is more than just a reserve with a housing crisis didn't elicit the same reaction. There weren't many comments - a few of them were negative but the majority of them were overwhelmingly positive.

It seemed that that a lot of them were from non-Aboriginal people who were grateful to her for sharing her story and giving a different view of life in Attawapiskat.



In my hometown we like to hunt and fish and in the summer I live to be on the water.

So many non-Aboriginal Canadians have reached out to us this week. They're excited that there is a space on cbc.ca to share these stories and have these discussions.

But we've also heard from Indigenous voices who wanted to know why we are keeping the comments open. I hope this post explains it.

And whether you agree or disagree, please keep sending us your feedback.

We want to keep this conversation going.

Valcourt reaches out to First Nations leaders on education plan

[CBC News](#)

Dec 13, 2013 2:04 PM



Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt has sent a letter to First Nations leaders urging them to reconsider the federal government's draft plan for native education reform, following a chilly reaction to the plan from chiefs across the country. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

The federal government says it is willing to negotiate improvements to its plan to reform First Nations education and has dropped a 2014 deadline for the legislation.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt has written a conciliatory open letter to the Assembly of First Nations, saying the government agrees with key aboriginal conditions set out last month that threatened to derail the reform process.

Valcourt urges the assembly to reconsider the education bill that would put more control in the hands of First Nations themselves.

"The government of Canada agrees that First Nations must have control over their education," Valcourt wrote. "The proposal that I put forth is intended to empower those who know best what their children need — First Nations, parents, communities and administrators — to determine what is most effective for their success."

Valcourt was responding to a Nov. 25 letter from Shawn Atleo, national chief of the assembly of First Nations, in which he outlined five conditions for moving ahead with reforms.

Atleo said any agreement must allow for native control of education, provide a statutory funding guarantee, recognize native languages and culture, provide shared oversight and ensure continuing and meaningful engagement.

There will be no compromise on principles, he added.

"First Nation control of the education of our children must be the overriding, paramount principle of all our work."

Valcourt said the government plan already meets all five conditions, and also deals with issues raised by the federal auditor general in a 2011 report. But he also hinted at new flexibility in the details of the legislation.

"New funding will be available if legislative reform takes place," he wrote.

But Valcourt also said the government is open to negotiation.

"The consultation process is not finished and there is no deadline. We are only on the first draft of a bill."

He said the legislation provides for a full review after five years, which will allow First Nations to further refine the law.

AFN to review Valcourt's letter

Atleo issued a cautious statement, calling Valcourt's response "important" and noting the minister's offer of more discussions.

"We will make efforts to ensure First Nations are aware of the minister's response," Atleo said. "We will be carefully reviewing the minister's letter and setting out next steps through dialogue with all First Nations."

Valcourt's letter also pointed out that chiefs have directed Atleo and the assembly to continue working with the government.

"While we have an enormous challenge ahead of us, it is not insurmountable," he wrote.

Graduation rates among aboriginal children are dramatically lower than among non-aboriginal children — a long-standing impediment to prosperity that all sides believe needs to be addressed.

Valcourt said there are signs this can be reversed.

"We see success already before us — such as with a graduation rate among the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia that is more than double the national average. Our challenge is to make successes like this the norm, not the exceptions."

Valcourt said he is ready to listen to ideas for improving the federal proposals.

Atleo's letter said the process can still be successful.

"We must remove every reason and every excuse to not act — but rather create the proper and rightful environment to act now together for our children today and tomorrow."

Valcourt seemed to echo that:

"We need to sit down now and have this discussion so that we can move forward together."

First Nations maternal support worker program first of its kind: New college program will train maternal support workers to help First Nations women

[CBC News](#)

Dec 16, 2013 3:11 PM ET

Confederation College and Sioux Lookout hospital plan to launch a new program to help hundreds of First Nations women and their new babies every year.

Starting next year, they will train more than 30 maternal support workers in northwestern Ontario.

Officials say it will be a positive change for the more than 400 women who leave their remote communities to give birth at Sioux Lookout's Meno Ya Win Health Centre.

They wait in a hostel next to the hospital — often for weeks — to go into labour.



Meno Ya Win Health Centre Chief of staff Dr. Terry O'Driscoll says she hopes the new maternal support workers based at the Sioux Lookout hospital will help ease the isolation and fear often experienced by First Nations women who often have to travel from their remote communities — and give birth to their babies — alone. (Supplied)

Chief of staff and family doctor Terry O'Driscoll described what happened to one 18-year-old expectant mother: "She was on her own, she was afraid, she was crying."

Unless it's a higher-risk pregnancy, or the mother-to-be is under 16, there's no travel

funding for family members to accompany them.

"I can't think of a worse ... way to ... welcome your baby into the world than being alone like that," O'Driscoll said.

"You're asking people to leave their homes, to leave their families, to come to a centre to and sit for a couple of weeks, up to a month potentially, to wait and have their baby. Away from other kids they might have at home ... and potentially even away from their spouse."

Easing isolation and fear

It is hoped the new maternal support workers based at the Sioux Lookout hospital will alleviate that isolation and fear.

The program will also train at least one maternal support worker in each of the 28 First Nation communities in the region, who will help prepare expectant mothers before they leave for the hospital. In addition, the workers will provide any support they need in caring for the new babies when they return home.



(CBC)

About 450 babies are born every year in Sioux Lookout .

The vice-president of Regional Workforce Development at Confederation College says the school is in the process of developing the program in conjunction with the Meno Ya

Win Health Centre as well as the Sioux Lookout Area Aboriginal Management Board.

"I think it's an incredible opportunity," Don Bernosky said, adding the program is the first of its kind in Ontario and one of the first of its kind in Canada.

How First Nations Guardians Defend British Columbia's Fragile Coast

[Indian Country Today](#)

December 16, 2013

Katie Hyslop

[Editor's note: Young Aboriginals in Canada, a fast-growing group, have their gaze set on taking expanding roles in realms such as politics and the economy. But most of those roles require a post-secondary education. With mainstream university settings clearly falling short, this new series by Tyee Solutions Society reporter Katie Hyslop looks at some unconventional institutions or programs which have set out to deliver post-secondary-level instruction, with a clearly indigenous voice. Watch for three further installments on The Tyee this week.]

It's a sunny afternoon in late July. Six First Nations students march across the white sand of North Beach on tiny Calvert Island in Queen Charlotte Sound, British Columbia, to greet two different groups of travellers.

Part of a class described as an "Introduction to Parks and Protected Areas," the students are learning the proper way to approach people in conservation areas: friendly and polite, but clearly informing the visitors about what they can and cannot do in the area.

The students—three women and three men—split up by sex. The women introduce themselves to the first group, four kayakers from the West Coast setting up a day camp on the beach. The men walk further down the beach to introduce themselves

to pilots of two small planes who have stopped for a snack on their way back from an Oregon-to-Alaska round trip.

This could go badly: the students don't have the enforcement powers of park rangers or Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) enforcement officers, and might not command the same respect as those officials. But the travellers are friendly and willing to talk about where they're from and why they're on the beach. The students, a little shy around the strangers, are slowly warming up to their assignment.

Among themselves the students are more outgoing, joking and laughing like old friends even though some met only the week before. "What an engaging class," their instructor, Marilyn Funk, had mused earlier that day. "So different from my first year [students]."

But while these students are learning to perform duties typically handled by BC Parks or DFO, they're not training for government jobs. Instead they're part of the Stewardship Technician Training Program, a partnership between Vancouver Island University (VIU) and the Coastal Stewardship Network, formerly, and in some communities still, known as Guardian Watchmen.

The men and women, who range in age from barely 18 to 50-plus, have varying levels of experience and formal training but, until now, little to no post-secondary education. This is a problem, since budget cuts at both BC Parks and DFO have increasingly left these local residents as the only eyes and ears patrolling the coastal waters, beaches, and forests north of Vancouver Island for poachers, polluters or lost tourists.



The non-profit Hakai Beach Institute on Calvert Island offered its well-equipped lodge for classroom training closer to trainees' home communities. (Photo: Katie Hyslop)

The new program, funded by the provincial and federal governments, is designed specifically to meet their needs. Seven one-week courses, delivered over eight months at three locations closer to their communities than most provincial post-secondary institutions, will help these trainee technicians advance in their careers. For some it might even open the door to a higher level of education.

"There's a couple of students in this program who want to go on and do their bachelor degree or the certificate programs at VIU, so this is a good start," said Sandra Thomson, a communications and outreach worker with the Coastal Stewardship Network.

"It's a big commitment of time, so it's about learning and training," she added. "But it's also about starting to get credit and credentials around the training they're taking."

Guardians of the rainforest

B.C.'s Central Coast houses the Great Bear Rainforest, the largest intact temperate rainforest left in the world. Attracting environmentalists, tourists, big game hunters, and natural resource developers from all over the globe, this fragile and much-coveted ecosystem has been home to First Nations for over 10,000 years.

But full-time, sustainable employment is sparse in the region's scattered communities. The lack of economic options prompted seven First Nations along the Central and North Coasts—including the Wuikinuxv, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xaixais, Nuxalk, Gitga'at, Metlakatla, Haida and, until last year, the Haisla Nation—to come together in 2000 to form the Coastal First Nations Great Bear Initiative (CFN GBI) to improve access to their traditional territories and unlock its economic opportunities.

Six years later, the B.C. government took steps to protect both the vulnerable rainforest and the interests of its First Nations, environmentalists, and industry, through Central Coast and North Coast Land and Resource Management Plans covering 6.4 million hectares of land.



The beach offers an outdoor classroom for trainee Guardian Watchmen technicians. (Photo: Katie Hyslop)

Of that area, 1.8 million ha were placed in nature conservancies to be protected from development. The rest was divided between [Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas](#), where forestry and commercial hydro projects are banned but mining and resource extraction for First Nations food, social, and ceremonial purposes are permitted, and [Ecosystem-based Management Operating Areas](#), which allow commercial resource extraction which strives to leave the smallest environmental footprint possible.

The Resource Management Plans paved the way for a [Land and Resource Protocol Agreement](#) signed between the provincial government and the CFN GBI to establish a new working relationship.

Refusing to accept a status equivalent to outside interests as just additional "stakeholders," the First Nations demanded that the provincial government negotiate implementation of the Resource Management Plans on a "government-to-government" basis. The province agreed, giving First Nations a say over managing coastal resources. The unprecedented concession renewed the area's original inhabitants' sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, their territories' natural wealth.

To help ensure that the agreements served their best interests, the CFN GBI member nations created the Guardian Watchmen to share information and best

practices for managing issues from fish populations to whale monitoring and bear protection.

At the same time, environmental organizations and First Nations raised \$60 million in private funds, which was matched by \$60 million in provincial and federal funds, to invest in conservation, research and resource stewardship, as well as "sustainable business ventures" in their communities. Interest earned from the copy20-million Coast Opportunities Fund now helps finance the Coastal Stewardship Network.

Although hundreds of kilometres apart in some cases, the participating nations found that working together was better than trying to go it alone.

"The initial benefits came in relation to finding out what other communities were doing; finding that some of their programs were similar or the same as ours, and comparing the results," said Mike Reid, Heiltsuk aquatics manager, whose community of Bella Bella hosted the first meeting of Guardian Watchmen in 2007.

"The bigger thing was connecting with those other communities to get a bigger picture of what was going on with all of the things that we were monitoring and what we were concerned about."

Traditional training a bad fit

But that role has expanded in response to funding cuts to BC Parks [starting](#) in 2009, and to [DFO](#) in 2012. First Nations stewards now find themselves picking up much of the work formerly done by government agents: monitoring the health of local wildlife and recording and reporting resource and recreation activity on their lands.

"If you look at a map at the end of the field season, of where these [stewardship technicians] have been, they're out there every day for six months of the year, if not longer. And DFO and the agencies, as their staff gets cut back and the funding gets cut back, they're just not the ones out there," Thomson told The Tyee Solutions Society.

The only thing they can't do that government agents could is enforce the law.

"It's not legal authority," Thomson added, "but it's situational authority, contextual authority, authority because they do have rights and title to manage their resources. It's one of the steps towards asserting rights and title."

But as their responsibilities expanded, many coastal stewards also lacked training equivalent to their government counterparts. First Nations did provide some training basics like wilderness first aid, bear safety, GPS use, and small vessel operation and minor repairs. But for small communities with even smaller budgets, post-secondary level training was too far away and too expensive to fund.

The Coastal Stewardship Network previously tried to address the shortfall through the [Coastal Guardian Watchmen Training Program](#) provided by Northwest Community College (NWCC) in Terrace. Participating nations sent their stewards to month-long modules offered in Haida Gwaii in 2008 and Prince Rupert in 2009.

But some couldn't afford to send all, or even any, of their workers so far from home for training. Others had workers take the training only to leave soon after for more full-time positions (most coastal stewards work only eight months of the year).



Class photo time: Learning from earlier experience, the new training program brings educators to the students. (Photo: Katie Hyslop)

Jennifer Walkus, former fisheries manager for the Wuikinuxv First Nation, sent her three Guardian Watchmen to the training. One fell in love and never returned, while the other two came back for a season but within a year found new jobs outside of the

community.

"If you can't afford to keep someone working year-round, then quite often they will move on. And the problem with having a small pocket of funding is you can't necessarily find as much work [as they need]," Walkus said. To respond, her small community has scraped together other small contracts and applied for more [Coast Opportunity Funds](#) to keep the Watchmen working year-round in 2013.

For her part, outreach officer Thomson says Northwest's program didn't really fit with the Watchmen's training needs: "It was less customized for the work that people were doing on the ground. [NWCC] were trying to fit [people into] the courses that they already had from other programs, and it was set up more according to how [NWCC] manages their programs, by semesters."

Governments fund training

In 2012, a new training opportunity emerged. The [Aboriginal Community Based Delivery Partnership Program](#), a Canada/B.C. labour market agreement, was accepting applications for post-secondary training programs offered in first nations communities that would increase their members' employment opportunities.

Drawing on conversations already under way with Vancouver Island University, the Network asked its member nations to identify training needs, and tried to match them to courses offered through VIU.

Together, VIU and the Network developed seven, one-week, full-time learning modules based on several existing courses in the university's Resource Management Officer Technology—the same program that many aspiring BC Parks rangers and DFO enforcement agents take.

The new initiative applied insights gained from the earlier experience with NWCC. "We've learned a lot, which is why [the VIU partnership] is set up with these shorter modules based closer to home, as much as that's been possible," said Thomson.

Again, unlike the NWCC training, most of these courses also come with university credits accepted equally by VIU and the BC Institute of Technology. They also qualify graduates for recognition by the BC Archeology Association to do inventories of cultural sites, or for BC Parks administration certification, opening the door to further post-secondary certificates, diplomas and degrees.



Recording cultural artifacts: trainees emerge with new qualifications and credits good for further post-secondary learning. (Photo: Katie Hyslop)

The past three years, offered to provide the location for the new program's first four modules, plus room and board for students, faculty and network staff, free of charge.

Stewardship training was scheduled at the same time as students and faculty from Simon Fraser University's Hakai Network for Coastal People, Ecosystems and Management were conducting research in the area, exposing each group to what the other had to offer in experience and knowledge of resources on the coast.

Participating nations only had to pay for transportation—up to a two-day boat trip from Haida Gwaii to Calvert Island—and accommodation for modules set elsewhere.

Sixteen stewardship technicians and managers signed up for the seven weeks of training. In addition to the Parks and Protected Areas course, they learned about archeology and culturally modified trees, about environmental monitoring, Aboriginal resource management issues, how to communicate legal requirements to natural

resource users and document non-compliance, and boat motor servicing (a critical skill in an area where a break-down can be life-threatening).

"We've had great appreciation for the Hakai Beach Institute for their generous donation," VIU Aboriginal projects manager Sheila Cooper said. "That really set the program off, allowing the students to gel because they were living together, eating together, being students and bonding. That was an amazing gift."

In addition to the four modules provided at Hakai in June and July, two were delivered in Prince Rupert in October. A final session will take place in February in Port Hardy on Vancouver Island.

The university, Cooper said, is already planning to run more modules next year—if funding can be found. The Aboriginal Partnership program was a one-time deal.

Earning that piece of paper

Although the Stewardship Network was only established six years ago, some nations, like the Haisla, have been conducting their own stewardship activities for decades. So after over 20 years on the job, there wasn't much new the courses could teach Chris Wilson from the Haisla Nation—who still call their stewards Guardian Watchmen—that he didn't already know. But until the VIU program, he had little formal training, or formal credit for his skills.

"Most of this stuff I've done before," Wilson explained. "It's just I had no certification. I picked [it] up working with other people," and from the non-credit NWCC training.

But at only 46, Wilson's not too old to go back to school or change careers. Armed with new university credits, he's now considering going further, either through NWCC's Applied Coastal Ecology program, or securing a Resource Management Officer Technology diploma or degree at VIU.

Tara Brennan, a forest technician from Masset on Haida Gwaii, has less experience than Wilson. At 28, she's had this job for less than two years, but she's already encountered many of the situations the courses are teaching her how to handle, like what to do when she stumbles over culturally significant artifacts.

For example, she said, "I found two canoes in our protected area." While neither has been properly dated, one was made with stone tools. Before her training, when Brennan made such a find, she had to call in an archeologist to assess its significance. Now she and her Haida co-workers can do that themselves.

Brennan would also like to use the training she's received to further her career, possibly with a promotion to crew leader within the Haida Mapping Department

where she works. She also plans to go back to school next February, either to the University of Victoria or "anywhere that [ethnobotanist and Plants of Haida Gwaii author] Nancy Turner is."

But the training will also help her band. With the Haida Nation negotiating land claims with the province, Brennan and her three fellow forest techs in Masset are busy mapping protected sites to collect evidence of their ancestors' presence before colonization.

Watching whales is easy, it's people that are difficult

Back on Calvert Island, the sun is setting on the first day of Parks and Protected Areas training—the fourth and last course of the Hakai module. Heiltsuk fisheries technicians Randy Carpenter and Richard Reid are taking Thomson and instructor Marilyn Funk out on their boat for a quick runabout.



Richard Reid on the water: boat maintenance is a survival skill; personal confidence is important for dealing with visitors. (Photo: Katie Hyslop)

If you ask the Heiltsuk men, who hail from Bella Bella, they'll tell you that Calvert Island is in their territory. If you ask the Wuikinuxv from Rivers Inlet, they'll say the island belongs to them. But when stewardship technicians from both nations meet there for training, there is no tension between them.

"[We] seem to leave the arrogance and the animosity and rash feelings at home," Reid says before adding with a chuckle, "War does exist, but just in the Middle East. It doesn't happen here anymore."

An intimidating presence with his shaved head, broad shoulders and dark sunglasses, Reid, 40, nonetheless values the new confidence gained from that morning's practice talking to travellers. Especially, he laughs, "if you're not being treated politely back."

"Today I did it no problem, like it was just a walk in the park. Just doing my job. It feels pretty good not worrying about how I'm going to look or sound."

Navigating rising waves—seven feet tall, Reid estimates at one point—the two men steer their boat south, following the shore and looking for the ancient petroglyphs that Simon Fraser University students reported finding on some smaller islands. Funk and Thomson are hoping to see some humpback whales. But with the exception of a few birds and a DFO boat speeding away in the distance, they come up empty.

"We don't even notice the humpbacks anymore," shrugs Carpenter, who's been on the job for 10 years.

With so much to watch for on the open ocean—fishing infractions, tsunami debris; and ashore—illegal forestry or visitors trespassing on cultural sites—whale spotting comes last for First Nations stewards.

Katie Hyslop writes about education and youth well-being for [Tyee Solutions Society](#). This article was produced by Tyee Solutions Society in collaboration with Tides Canada Initiatives (TCI), with funding from the Vancouver Foundation. TCI and the Vancouver Foundation neither influence nor endorse the particular content of TSS' reporting. Other publications wishing to publish this story or other Tyee Solutions Society-produced articles, please see the [Tyee Solutions Society](#) website for contacts and information.

First Nations Education Act confounds educators: On-reserve school already meets provincial education standards, education director says

[CBC News](#)

Dec 16, 2013 2:28 PM ET



Earlier this month, about 100 people rallied in downtown Sudbury against the

federal government's proposed First Nations Education Act. The plan for First Nations education has drawn criticism and public protest in recent weeks. (Megan Thomas/CBC)

People who have worked to create a successful on-reserve school near North Bay say the federal government's plan for First Nations education won't bring the results it's looking for.

The proposed plan to improve on-reserve education and graduation rates has drawn criticism and public protest in recent weeks.

The new act would see the feds create and enforce standards for on reserve schools and give officials the power to take schools over if they don't meet expectations.

Nipissing First Nation Education Director Fran Couchie said it's an approach poisoned by history.

"I don't know how many times the government has to go through this and see that top down doesn't work," she said. "[Look at] residential schools ... [as a] prime example."

Couchie says Nipissing First Nation is continuing self-government negotiations with Ottawa, something she said could eventually exempt the reserve from the new First Nations Education Act.

Funding details needed

Teacher Muriel Sawyer has seen a lot of changes in education during the 40 years she has been teaching Ojibway — first in a Catholic school, and now at Nbisiing Secondary, an on-reserve school in Nipissing.

The school has about 90 students — and a graduation rate on par with, or slightly above, the provincial average.

"That uniqueness of our culture and language comes through, which then leads to fostering self-esteem, self-identity and the self-worth that so many hundreds of years before robbed our communities and our children," she said

Ottawa now says there is some wiggle room on its plan for First Nations Education.

In an [open letter to the Assembly of First Nations](#), Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt said he is willing to negotiate improvements to the First Nations Education Act.

The draft legislation was panned by Aboriginal leaders when it was introduced last month — in part because it does not lay out how the system will be funded.

Fran Couchie said it's a key detail.

"You know they said we will implement this system and then we will talk about funding. I would like to ask any school board in Ontario whether they'd assume running a school system without some guarantee of what the funding is going to look like," she said.

Couchie added she doesn't understand why the proposed legislation would set federal education standards for on-reserve schools, as Nbisiing Secondary already meets provincial education standards.

"Here with our secondary school, we do work with the ministry to ensure our curriculum is meeting the needs to grant credits and graduation diplomas that are on par with what the provincial system is doing," she said.

"We want our kids to be able to go on and be successful [in] whatever they choose to do."

Putting a face on aboriginal homelessness in Montreal

[CBC News](#)

Dec 13, 2013 12:59 PM ET

Caroline Nepton



Lava Partridge, Simiuni Nauya and his brother Lucassie Nauya are part of a growing population of homeless Inuit in Montreal. (CBC)

Since 2007, Caroline Nepton Hotte has hosted Boréal hebdo, a French-language program about the North, airing on CBC North radio. She also worked on the award-winning 8th Fire television series as a field producer. She is a member of the community of Mashteuiatsh, near Lac Saint-Jean, Que.

I'm at the entrance of a big brown warehouse on de la Gauchetiere Street in a Montreal neighbourhood close to downtown. It's dark and cold, and there's blowing snow.

A group of people are gathered outside, waiting for the doors of the front-line service centre, Project autochtone du Québec (PAQ), to open.

"Montreal, it's hard at the beginning, you don't know that much people, you don't know that much resources," says Simiuni Nauya. who is waiting in the lineup. The 28-year-old Inuk is originally from Ivujivik, in northern Quebec.

A co-ordinator is making decisions about who he will allow in for the night. Those who have had too much to drink are asked to wait outside for an hour to sober up.

Simiuni, his brother Lucassie and Lava Partridge, a friend who arrived four years ago from Kuujjuaq, make the cut and are registering inside.

The three young Inuit stick together during the day and even at night when they go to PAQ.

"We're like brothers," laughs Simiuni, as he looks at Partridge who has a black eye. He got into a fight in the street a couple of days ago, but he is not telling the story, just smiling and raising his eyebrows to answer yes.

'The reasons for the increasing number of Inuit moving to the south, and of homeless Inuit, are directly related to social, economic and housing problems in the north.' - *Donat Savoie, northern affairs consultant*

Partridge does not want to be forced back up north, because he doesn't have a place to stay. He doesn't have much family left in Kuujjuaq. They all live somewhere around Montreal, some with apartments and jobs.

Montreal is in the midst of a real homelessness crisis among aboriginal people. The fastest growing population are Inuit from Nunavik, which comprises the northern third of the province of Quebec.

Montreal is behind in terms of services, compared to other big cities like Vancouver, Calgary or Winnipeg.

"The reasons for the increasing number of Inuit moving to the south, and of homeless Inuit, are directly related to social, economic and housing problems in the North," said Donat Savoie, a northern affairs consultant.

"It is caused by a combined force of factors, including housing and job shortages, and social problems," he continues.

"Last year, two Inuit died on the streets of Montreal, nobody heard about it," says Damien Silès, general director at the Société de Développement Social de Ville-Marie (SDSVM).

"Now we have more than 400 aborigines in the streets and the services for them are lacking."

New services are on the way for Simiuni, his brother and his friend.

"For now we are talking about basic services: food, socks, blankets, with the contribution of Doctors Without Borders, in the street, maybe it will be better," adds Silès. A new homeless shelter with more beds will also be built.

It's Christmas soon and Simiuni is planning to see his four-year-old daughter who lives with her mother in Montreal.

"At the beginning it was the three of us. And then I started drinking," said Simiuni.
"Not so much at the beginning, but then it was too much."

Simiuni is learning to be a carver at the Native Friendship Center. As he tells the story, his white hands from the dust of carving rocks are rubbing off on his warm cup of coffee. He has tried to keep a job, but was not always successful.

Asked why he kept drinking knowing he might lose a relationship, he could not answer clearly. "I guess it's from the pain."

Simiuni left his village at the age of 10 to live in the city with his mother, but then was placed in foster homes until he was 18. He would like to go back to Ivujivik, but the plane ticket is too expensive and he might not have a home.

In the living room of PAQ, people gather like a family in front of a movie on the television. For this moment, the community is at peace.

Simiuni has been sober for the past two weeks and feels proud. He is pleased that new services will be available for First Nations and Inuit, but he dreams to eventually have his own place, maybe back home in Nunavik.

Where does the word "Eskimo" come from?: "There's a plausible etymological connection between Eskimo and the Spanish word Cimarron"

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

December 13, 2013

Colin Alexander

In September the Ottawa Citizen printed an editorial saying it was no longer appropriate to have a Canadian Football League team called the Edmonton Eskimos. Right on!

But the editorial went on to repeat the myth that “Eskimo” means “eater of raw meat” in an Amerindian language. Why is that a distinctive characteristic let alone insulting? Lots of people eat raw meat, and smart restaurants call it steak tartare.

The definitive negating authority for an Amerindian origin is R. H. Ives Goddard III, senior linguist in the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. Here’s his conclusion:

“In spite of the tenacity of the belief, both among Algonquian speakers and in the anthropological and general literature...that Eskimo means ‘raw-meat eaters’, this explanation fits only the cited Ojibwa forms (containing Proto-Algonquian ashk- ‘raw’ and po- ‘eat’) and cannot be correct for the presumed Montagnais source of the word Eskimo itself...”

In any case, Europeans almost always gave their own names to people and places new to them, as they did for American “Indians,” and for Lachine in Quebec when they thought they’d arrived in China.

In 1977, in the erroneous belief that “Eskimo” is pejorative, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in Barrow, Alaska, officially adopted “Inuit” as their designation for all Inuit/Eskimos, from Russia to Greenland. The Canadian government has adopted the word, as have most of the world’s news media.

But acceptance is not universal, and problems persist, along with the mistaken myth that “Eskimo” is disparaging.

There’s an immediate problem because Inuit/Eskimo peoples generally refer to themselves by the name for their own community—as do the Welsh and the Scots while also being British.

Inuit/Eskimos in Canada’s central Arctic, for example, call themselves Inuinnaq. Greenlanders call themselves Kalaallit or indeed, as Greenlanders.

Some Yupik in Alaska and Russia object to being called “Inuit,” which is not a word in their language. But they accept “Eskimo.” American vice-presidential aspirant Sarah Palin’s Alaskan husband is quite definitely “half Eskimo.”

The word “Inuit” also creates a recurring problem with mistaken English usage. “Inuit” is plural, and it also serves as the adjective. But one person is an Inuk.

So if not Amerindian, where, then, does the word “Eskimo” come from? I believe it dates from ancient times in Europe, as used by transatlantic mariners from the Iberian Peninsula — today’s Spain and Portugal.

There's a plausible etymological connection between Eskimo and the Spanish word Cimmaron, deriving from Latin *Cimmerii* and Greek *Kimmerioi*.

Almost 3,000 years ago the Greek poet Homer referred to a mythological northern people called *Kimmerioi* who lived in perpetual mist and darkness. This fits for people living through a northern winter, which is certainly a distinctive characteristic. We may note, incidentally, that linguistically C and K are interchangeable, as with cereal and kerosene, both from the same root.

I think we may compare Homer's reference to the *Kimmerioi* with the mythology of the unicorn. There must have been enough travel into the High Arctic in prehistoric times for a few narwhal tusks to arrive in southern Europe and Asia for people then to invent an image of the animal they might have come from.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization's chief of Arctic archaeology, Pat Sutherland, has found considerable evidence of Norse contact with Inuit/Eskimo people during the medieval warm period from about 800 to 1300 (when the ancestors of modern Inuit/Eskimos arrived from Siberia, displacing the Dorset culture and people known to us as "Paleo-Eskimos.")

The Norse gave the name *Skraelings* to the people they met and that word still means *foreigner* in Icelandic.

But were the Norse the only people from Europe to give Inuit/Eskimos a name?

Harvard professor Barry Fell has written convincing books suggesting that there was transatlantic traffic thousands of years ago, notably by Phoenician sailors, and Plato wrote of land far beyond the Pillars of Hercules, known to us as the Straits of Gibraltar. We may assume, though, that these mariners wanted to keep potentially valuable information about where they had been to themselves.

Classic evidence of the desire for secrecy is the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494. Two years after Columbus returned from the Caribbean, Pope Alexander VI ruled on the meridian dividing Spanish and Portuguese spheres of interest. He established it half way between the Cape Verde Islands, already Portuguese, and the islands Columbus said he had found. Evidently, the Portuguese kept quiet about the area now called Brazil that was known to them, but not to the Spanish representatives.

Further support for my theory comes from the fact that there's the apparently ancient loan word in Inuktitut *Puatiki* or *Portugee* for a black man. Centuries ago, the Portuguese mostly manned their ships with black African crews, and oral traditions would have carried this word forward.

The word "Eskimo" will endure in literature written before 1977 and it served Inuit well for selling art around the world.

So I think it's a pity that it has wrongly come to be thought of as pejorative. It's the only useful generic word for circumpolar Inuit/Eskimos. To cite a similar example, the Romans and the Greeks called the Celts "Welsh," meaning "foreigner," and the Cumri of Wales readily accept what other people call them.

Carrying forward my speculation about European origins, I believe the word Canada has a similar linguistic origin. To discourage competition, sailors in ancient times almost certainly wanted to say there was nothing there where they had been. With the same interchange between hard and soft C, we have *ca nada* meaning just that.

In any case none of this makes acceptable the cultural misappropriation of Eskimos for a football team in Alberta.

*Colin Alexander was formerly the publisher of the Yellowknife weekly newspaper, *News of the North*. This commentary first appeared in *The Ottawa Citizen* on Dec. 11, 2013.*

Lessons, gifts or just good reads: Inhabit Media's newest publications: Nala's Magical Mitsiaq tells the story of Inuit custom adoption

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

December 16, 2013

Sarah Rogers



These are just a few of the children's books Inhabit Media published in 2013. (PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS)



Inuksiutiit's colourful cardboard pages teach basic Inuit words and objects.

Each year the Iqaluit-based Inhabit Media publishing house adds to its offering of traditional Inuit stories, told by modern voices and packaged alongside vivid illustrations.

As the holidays draw near, here is a selection of some of Inhabit Media's newest children's publications from 2013 that make for good gifts or reading over the holiday break:

- Babies, toddlers and new readers will enjoy Inhabit Junior's newly-published *Inuksiutiit*, colourful, cardboard reader that teaches basic Inuktitut words and numbers.

The eight-page book dedicates its small pages to Inuit terms like the qajaq, qulliq or ulu, illustrated and spelled out in large-font Inuktitut syllabics and Roman characters. Each page in *Inuksiutiit* counts from one to eight, showing that number of objects on each page.

- In *Grandmother Ptarmigan*, Cape Dorset elder Qaunaq Mikkigak retells the traditional Inuit tale of a baby ptarmigan who won't go to sleep.

When he repeatedly asks his grandmother to tell him a story, she gives in, telling him a frightening story he'll never forgot.

Grandmother Ptarmigan was written by Joanne Schwartz, who collaborated with Mikkigak, who is known locally for her storytelling. The pair also worked together to produce Inhabit Media's Legend of the Fog and our Corner Grocery Store.

The picture book version of the story is illustrated by Toronto artist Qin Leng.

- In the *Raven and the Loon*, a raven flies into loon's igloo one day and won't let her sew in peace.

Finally, the birds decide to make new coats for each other, although it leads to a feud. The story explains, why, to this day, ravens have black feathers and loons have flat feet.

The story was written by Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley, who also worked together on Inhabit's collection of Inuit mythology called *Ajiiit: Dark Dreams of the Ancient Arctic*.

Young readers will enjoy following the tiff between the two animals in *The Raven and the Loon*, enhanced by the expressive illustrations, done by Kim Smith.

- *Nala's Magical Mitsiaq: A story of Inuit adoption* is an important addition to Inhabit Media's offerings.

The story shares a story of Inuit custom adoption, told through the words of first-time author and adoptive mother Jennifer Noah.

In *Nala's Magical Mitsiaq*, a mother has two daughters, one who she gave birth to the story and another who she adopted.

One day during a blizzard, the family stays in their Iqaluit home while the mother tells the girls the stories of where they came from.

"Qiatsuk grew in my belly, while Nala grew in my heart," she says.

The story introduces readers to Inuit custom adoption and the importance of the practice in Inuit culture.

"Nala's Mystical Mitsiaq was written because I wanted to be able to read a children's book to my panic to which she could relate," writes the author in the book's epilogue. "I also wrote the story so that children who have been adopted from Nunavut to other parts of Canada will know how amazing the journey they took to find their families was, and to show those children how revered and celebrated the practice of adoption is among Inuit."

The book also includes a glossary of Inuktitut terms such as mitsiaq (umbilical cord) or tiguarniq (the act of adopting.)

And finally, this book hears from other Inuit adoptive mothers about their own experiences.

The book's two characters, Qiatsuk and Nala are named after Qiatsuk Noah and Nala Alainga, who together helped the Canadian government legally recognize the practice of Inuit custom adoption in 1960.

The titles are available in both Inuktitut and English at Arctic Ventures in Iqaluit or online by visiting [Inhabit Media](#).

Inuit treatment residents hopeful, wary, about the holidays: "The depth of trauma among Inuit is breathtaking"

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

December 13, 2013

Lisa Gregoire



The morning group therapy session at Mamisarvik Healing Centre in Ottawa begins with a prayer. On this day, clients discuss forgiveness, and their plans for coping in a healthy way once they leave the centre. (PHOTO BY LISA GREGOIRE)



Counsellor and Indian Residential School co-ordinator Meeka Papatsie hugs one of the young clients who has just come through the six-week trauma and addiction program at Mamisarvik Healing Centre in Ottawa. (PHOTO BY LISA GREGOIRE)

alcoholism, child sexual abuse and guilt.

They are talking about forgiveness.

"I think it's a very important part of my recovery. As long as I don't let things go, I will have resentments. Therefore, I learn how to forgive myself," says one woman.

"It's so complicated," she goes on. "I didn't see that I was hurt. I thought it was my fault... I have childhood traumas but I have to take care of myself."

Another man, a little older, is less generous.

"I'm having a hard time forgiving some stuff right now. It makes me really angry," he says. Tears fall down his face and a younger man hands him a box of tissues.

"I have three cousins dead, brothers dead, because they were physically and sexually abused. I tried to forgive those people who did that but it's so hard... I thought sexual abuse was part of life. It's not part of life."

These men and women are taking part in group therapy in their final week of residential addictions and trauma treatment at the Mamisarvik centre in Ottawa, one of only two Inuit-specific treatment centres in Canada. The only other centre is a small one in Kuujjuaq called Isuarsivik.

Some 500 Inuit have undergone treatment here in the 10 years since Mamisarvik began operating under the umbrella of Tungasuvvingat Inuit, the Ottawa-based service organization for Inuit. While the centre does address addiction, it is more focused on treating trauma and other root causes of addiction.

But the centre will undergo a [massive restructuring in 2014](#) now that the federal government has discontinued the Aboriginal Healing Foundation fund which gave the centre \$806,000 annually — about half their budget.

Ben Bridgstock, the centre's new director and former head of a Salvation Army addiction program in Ottawa, said Mamisarvik isn't the only organization suffering under the loss of AHF funding.

But he said the centre is unique because it serves an Inuit clientele in a culturally-sensitive way and in Inuktitut.

"We're the only one doing what we're doing for this particular segment of the population and it would be a tragedy if that were somehow jeopardized or diluted because we don't have the money," Bridgstock said. "I don't know why the policy is the way it is."

Mamisarvik gets the remainder of its funding from the Government of Nunavut and Corrections Canada for client referrals.

After this current session ends Dec. 18, Mamisarvik will move from a schedule that saw four, six-week client intakes annually to a continuous intake system so that beds can be filled year round.

Mamisarvik is also going through an accreditation process and training upgrade to better market itself to other jurisdictions and hopefully broaden its client base.

But ultimately, Mamisarvik may have to cut extras such as elders and others who come in for cultural programs and retreats into nature where counsellors say the deepest disclosures often occur.

"In the long run, I'm confident it will be successful and it will enhance the program because we will have to be more fiscally responsible, more businesslike," said Bridgstock. "But for the next little while, it will be very difficult."

On Dec. 18, the current group of clients, who have spent six weeks untangling years of destructive behaviour to get to the root causes of their pain, will graduate from the program — people abused or neglected by family members, husbands and wives, priests and other so-called leaders.

And then they'll go home, to southern cities, and northern towns, to holiday celebrations that will probably include some of the people, memories and triggers that sent them here in the first place.

The group therapy session on Dec. 6 is an attempt to remind clients that they have many healthy coping options, from taking walks and volunteering their time to identifying sober, supportive friends they can call and visit.

Counsellor Natasha Aaluk, who is helping to lead the session, says clients must practice coping now, and have a plan in place, so they're not caught unprepared when anxiety, fear, panic or anger overtake them after they leave Mamisarvik.

"This is something I learned from Rick," says one man, referring to counsellor Rick Mayoh. "One thing you can't take away from me is how I react to what you do to me. I can choose to believe and act the way I choose. No one can make me feel a certain way."

Mayoh, who is in the room, whispers a victorious, "Yes," pleased that his teachings are getting through.

Mayoh, who started working at Mamisarvik in 2004, is very discouraged by the collapse in federal funding.

"I just go over it and over it in my head. This is one of the brightest jewels in the Inuit world, in a barren landscape of resources. How can they let this happen?" Mayoh asks.

The timing is particularly bad given the latest revelations in the trial of disgraced priest Eric Dejaeger, convicted of the sexual abuse of children in Baker Lake and facing dozens of new charges from his time in Igloolik about 30 years ago.

Bridgstock said studies show the average sexual predator has 200 victims. Those victims learn inappropriate sexual behaviour and often victimize others, to the point where the abuse becomes widespread within a small population.

"So there's a massive need for treatment, to break that cycle and that repetition of abuse and re-victimization," Bridgstock said.

From what Mayoh has seen over the past decade, he agrees. "The depth of trauma among Inuit is breathtaking," he said.

"They come with tremendous courage and trust and they say, 'Help me.' One reason it works is because this is a safe place," he says, gesturing to walls covered with Inuit art and Inuktitut chatter from the kitchen. "They can say, 'I'm safe here. I can take a risk and I'll be OK."

Mamisarvik is a crucial training ground for Inuit social workers and counsellors, he added, but there are other unique aspects to Mamisarvik as well.

The centre holds daily co-ed group therapy sessions, a rarity in counselling circles that perhaps reflects the need Inuit feel to stick together and support each other, Mayoh said.

Through co-ed counselling, women who have suffered spousal abuse can see that men are suffering too. And men can see the depth of the pain they are causing women.

However, Mamisarvik does hold weekly gender-specific group therapy and on this day, counsellor Meeka Papatsie is doing something called "self-care" with the two women clients.

This involves soaking feet, facial masks and nail painting.

"We do intensive programming Monday to Friday. They take stuff from the inside and put it outside. But you have to take care of the outside too," said Papatsie, herself a recovered addict.

"When you are suffering, you don't care what you look like. I never used to look in the mirror because I didn't want to see what was looking back at me."

Before the session starts, one of the male clients says self-care sounds more fun than the session he's about to attend and asks if he can join the women. He's only half joking.

The two female clients smear their faces with coloured creams and explain what the program has meant to them.

"I'm going to have to face my wounds," says Lalli Betsy Annanack. "My anxiety is mostly gone. I make better decisions now. Every mistake is a lesson."

Colleen Ulayuruluk, 25, feels like she still has time to live a better, happier life.

"I'm so grateful to be here. I never knew about any of this before — trauma, addiction," she says. "I realized I had to forgive others back home, and I had to forgive myself for hurting others. Now that I have all this forgiveness, I feel so lifted."

We contacted Health Canada media relations to ask whether the department planned on replacing the AHF funding or whether there were other federal funding options for Mamisarvik.

Health Canada called to clarify the question but has not yet responded with information.



Colleen Ulayuruluk and Danny Napachee in the Mamisarvik kitchen. It was Napachee's turn to clean up after lunch Dec. 6. Residents who are physically able share cleaning duties through the week and cooking duties as well on the weekend, when there is no staff cook. (PHOTO BY LISA GREGOIRE)

Study: 9 Countries and the Way Laws Affect the Indigenous Peoples

[Indian Country Today](#)

December 16, 2013

Rick Kearns

The ways that laws affecting Indigenous Peoples in Latin America are interpreted by courts – including those dealing with control of natural resources, property and prior consultation – has been compiled into a 279-page digest that analyzes the legal debates and judicial decisions that impact indigenous communities in nine countries.

The Due Process Foundation in Washington, D.C. just published "The Digest of Latin American Jurisprudence Dealing with the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in participation, prior consultation and community property" by legal experts María Clara Galvis Patiño and Ángela María Ramírez Rincón.

The authors examine national and international laws and judicial decisions involving cases that have reached the highest courts of Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panamá and Perú. Many of the decisions are from

cases involving conflicts between indigenous communities and all of the nations listed in the book.

The four major sections of the digest address: how indigenous communities deserve special protection; political participation; the right to prior consultation; and the rights to ownership of the land, the territory and natural resources.

In the introduction to the digest, the authors acknowledge the importance of certain laws established in the 20th century such as Covenant 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) which spells out rights for indigenous communities in all the countries that signed the pact. However they assert that court decisions in the 21st century have made even more progress for the communities.

“...in a short time an important body of decisions has been produced that protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in particular at the level of interamerican jurisprudence and the pronouncements of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on the human rights situation and the fundamental liberties of the indigenous,” state Galvez and Ramirez.

“This body of fundamental international laws,” the authors continue, “of Indigenous Peoples influences more and more the decisions of national judges that have incorporated international juridical norms into internal juridical orders, and in more than a few occasions have gone beyond the international standards in the material to orient the design of public policy or to influence, not always successfully, a change in governmental practices that do not recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

Saugeen Ojibwe and U.S. Politicians Oppose Nuclear Waste Burial Near Lake Huron

[Indian Country Today](#)

December 12, 2013

Martha Troian



AP PHOTO/JOHN FLESHER

Currently intermediate-level radioactive waste rests in shallow pits at the Bruce Power nuclear complex near Kincardine, Ontario. Ontario Power Generation, a quasi-public company owned by the provincial government, wants to bury it.

A controversial proposal to bury nuclear waste a half mile from Lake Huron’s shoreline in Ontario is proceeding over indigenous

objections in a plan that has repercussions on both sides of the U.S.–Canada border.

Opposition to the plan, which would inter low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste about 2,230 feet underground in solid rock, is sparking opposition from Indigenous Peoples and U.S. politicians alike.

"We have a long list of fears, legitimate fears in our community about these facilities, interaction with our rights, our interests and our way of life," said Saugeen Ojibwe Nation Chief Randall Kahgee to Indian Country Today Media Network.

The Saugeen Ojibwe is one of several indigenous communities opposing the application of Ontario Power Generation for a license to store nuclear waste in an underground facility. Ontario Power, a public company owned by the provincial government, is one of the largest power generators in North America. It wants to construct a deep geologic repository—akin to a mine shaft—for storing low and intermediate-level nuclear waste within the municipality of Kincardine. The repository would be located at an existing nuclear site known as the Bruce Generating Station, where there is already a nuclear waste-management facility. The waste in question is stored there above-ground, or in shallow pits.

A three-member joint review panel appointed by the Canadian Nuclear Regulator, which oversees nuclear projects in Canada, wrapped up weeks of hearings at the end of October. The panel received submissions from disparate parties ranging from the public, to non-profit organizations, to indigenous groups and U.S. politicians. The panel will report to Canada's environment ministry after reviewing the testimony and documents, and the federal government will issue the final decision sometime in the spring.

Kincardine agreed to host the waste in return for \$35.7 million that Ontario Power will pay the town and some neighboring communities over 30 years. The facility would be about 2,300 feet (680 meters) below ground, built to store low and intermediate-level nuclear waste from the power generator's nuclear plants all over the province. Materials include the ashes of items used at nuclear facilities such as mops, clothes, floor sweepings and gloves, according to the [Canadian Press](#). Intermediate-level waste comprises things like filters, resins and reactor components. The site has been studied and analyzed by engineers, geologists, geoscientists and hydrologists and is safe for this purpose, Ontario Power officials told ICTMN.

"This is 450-million-year-old rock where we propose to store the low and intermediate waste," said company spokesperson Neal Kelly. "It can be safely stored, and there are multiple, natural barriers around it."

Company experts predict the rock will remain stable, which means the risk of radioactive leaks from the site is minute. The area is not known for earthquakes. Nor does it hold any resource potential, which eliminates the likelihood of people digging in the area in the future, Kelly said.

But this is not enough for Kahgee, whose Saugeen Ojibwe Nation lies on the shores of Lake Huron.

"We've been very careful how we've maneuvered ourselves with respect to this project," said Kahgee. "Our people should not have to shoulder the burden for the industry forever. That is something that is not contemplated in our treaties."

The Saugeen Ojibway Nation said they were never even consulted about construction of the Bruce Generating Station in the 1960s, despite its being located on their traditional territory. Bruce Power, the generating station's parent company, is the outfit that two years ago proposed to ship defunct radioactive steam generators by boat through the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway to Sweden for recycling.

Kahgee, who made three submissions to the joint review panel, said new issues kept arising out of the hearings, such as Ontario Power's desire to eventually store decommissioned waste there. But Kelly said the company would have to undergo another round of regulatory hearings to do so.

But that is just what alarms Kahgee, and it only validates his community's longstanding fears about Ontario Power's intentions. Ontario Power's president vowed not to put a shovel in the ground without Saugeen Ojibwe approval. The company has also agreed to deal with past grievances.

Stop The Great Lakes Nuclear Dump, a non-profit organization, has also spoken out against the project, collecting nearly 42,000 signatures in an online petition by late November. Notable signatories included reknowned Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki, Democratic Michigan State Senator Hoon-Yung Hopwood and Farley Mowat, a Canadian author. The organization has several concerns, said spokesperson Beverly Fernandaz, foremost among them being the site's proximity to North America's greatest fresh water supply, depended upon by 40 million people in two countries.

"A bulk of [Ontario Power's] outreach was in the local communities," she said, most of whose residents work for Ontario Power or Bruce Power, or are retirees receiving a salary or pension from the nuclear industry.

Moreover, Ontario Power did not inform New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Quebec or other Ontario communities outside of Bruce County, Fernandez said. However, Ontario Power has held hundreds of briefings over the past seven years, Kelly countered. Hearings or no, the opposition is strong in Michigan, which lies on the other side of Lake Huron from Ontario.

"Neither the U.S. nor Canada can afford the risk of polluting the Great Lakes with toxic nuclear waste," U.S. Representatives Dan Kildee, Sander Levin, John Dingell

and Gary Peters of Michigan said in a letter submitted to the panel, according to the Canadian Press.

These echo the concerns of the Saugeen Ojibwe.

"We do not think there's a sufficient record in front of the panel to make the recommendation for this project to proceed," said Kahgee.

But while his First Nation doesn't appear willing to store nuclear waste, other areas seem a little more open to the idea. Recently four communities in northwestern Ontario received \$400,000 from Nuclear Waste Management Organization for finishing the first round of study into becoming possible storage sites.

RCMP: section breaks down barriers with Alberni Aboriginal youth

[Alberni Valley News](#)

December 15, 2013

Wawmeesh G. Hamilton



Friendship Centre youth worker Celestine Andrews, second from left, has helped members of the aboriginal policing unit—Port Alberni RCMP members Cpl. Jay Donahue, left; Const. Peter Batt and Const. Scott MacLeod—meld with the kids. — image credit: WAWMEESH G. HAMILTON/Alberni Valley News

More than a year ago the relationship between youth at the Port Alberni Friendship Centre and Port Alberni RCMP was guarded at best and mistrustful at worst.

But a year of working together under the Aboriginal Policing

Agreement has removed the invisible barrier between the two groups and forced a partnership that is already yielding results.

The initiative is delivered through tripartite policing agreements among the federal government, provincial or territorial governments, and First Nation or Inuit communities.

"The agreement specifies enhanced policing services that communities have called for," said RCMP Cpl. Jay Donahue, who heads up the aboriginal policing section in Port Alberni.

The section is staffed with one corporal and three police officers.

The section works with the Tseshah, Hupacasath, Huu-ay-aht and Uchucklesaht First Nations, each of which signed separate agreements with the RCMP, as well as letters of expectation specifying what services they want.

The communities have some needs in common but they differ from one another as well. "One community may want us to work on alcohol abuse issues while another may want to work with the crime reduction strategy," Donahue said.

But aboriginal people don't just live on the reserves that have aboriginal policing agreements. According to Statistics Canada, more than 3,340 people in Port Alberni identify as being aboriginal. Of that number, 325 are between ages 15-19.

The Port Alberni Friendship Centre operates programs and a youth council for urban aboriginal youth. Celestine Andrews started working as a youth enhancement worker just over a year ago.

Working with the friendship centre isn't part of the aboriginal policing section's mandate per se, "but it is a centrepiece in the lives of many aboriginal people in the Valley, especially youth," Donahue said.

The historical relationship between youth at the friendship centre and the police is easy to describe — there wasn't one.

"The youth were guarded and didn't want to talk to the police," Andrews said. "A lot had bad pasts behind them and they were scared of being labeled troubled youth."

At one of the first youth council meetings she attended, Andrews was surprised to learn that youth wanted a better relationship with the officers they were leery of. "They wanted a positive relationship with them instead of being scared of them."

Andrews called the RCMP office, who put her in touch with Donahue.

Working with PAFC youth was a no-brainer, said Donahue. "Youth are an important focus. If you don't influence them at an early age then you miss the chance at intervening with negative influences."

Officers regularly attend youth council meetings, as well as participate on youth and family drop-in nights. They also help out with fundraising activities, one of which produced new floor hockey equipment, Andrews said.

"They play basketball, volleyball and now floor hockey with the youth."

The consistent interaction over a year has already produced some dividends. "We had some youth who had no respect for staff or for even the building," Andrews

said. "That's changed now, and they treat it more like a home—a safe and sober home."

Kids get a more complete view of officers than they normally would. "You deal with kids who maybe only ever saw police officers making arrests," said Const. Peter Batt, who works with the section. "When you interact with them more, then they communicate with you more and that's huge."

Donahue has been a police officer for more than 18 years, and has worked in Port Alberni, Campbell River and Hazelton, B.C. Working with the aboriginal policing section is a change of pace from the trenches of regular policing.

"I oversee three officers, perform different administrative duties and interact with aboriginal communities more than I did," he said.

This is Donahue's second stint with Alberni's aboriginal policing section. He worked here previously in 2008 and came back as its officer in charge in 2012.

Officers who work in the section are drawn from a pool of candidates who have expressed interest. Section members still assist with regular policing duties, Donahue said.

Batt is one of three constables who works with the aboriginal policing section in Alberni. Consts. Mike Bigg and Daniel Engle are part of the unit now, and Const. Scott MacLeod has begun working with the unit in anticipation of replacing a member headed back to general duties.

Constables each bring a different skill set to the table. Batt has worked in Alberni for more than seven years and delivers DARE training, while Const. Dan Engle does baby car seat clinics.

"We rarely work together. I might do something with Const. Engle this week and Const. Mike Bigg next week and sometimes we're on our own," he said.

The aboriginal policing agreement is important because it affords smaller communities the opportunity to access services over and above regular police work, Batt said.

One of the benefits of working in the program is that officers participate in problem solving as opposed to investigate-arrest-court-repeat police work.

"Revolving doors don't always solve problems," he said.

Instead, Batt is able to get out in the community to see what the issues are and then work with band councils on problem solving.

"You get to think outside the box and throw ideas out there. It's unconventional but you can be part of the solution."

The work with communities can be complicated when Batt or his section co-workers are called on to assist with an arrest in one of the communities. "That can devastate the relationships you're trying to build in the community," he said.

Constables Bert Calvo and Boyd Pearson previously worked with the aboriginal policing section in Alberni. Calvo is stationed in Cowichan and Pearson now works with the general duty section in Alberni.

Donahue couldn't say how many such policing agreements there are on the Island. But he confirmed that there are between 19-21 RCMP officers who work with aboriginal policing on the Island.

Makivik teams up with Montreal organizations to help city's homeless Inuit: "If nothing is done we will experience a continuous rise in Inuit homelessness"

[Nunatsiaq News](#)

December 17, 2013

Sarah Rogers



Makivik Corp.'s Robbie Watt, on the right, speaks at a Dec. 16 press conference at Montreal's Place-des-Arts metro station. Makivik, along with the provincial government and other organizations, announced they will expand a project that puts outreach workers into metro stations in the city's urban core to provide support to homeless people. Inuit make up about half of the homeless Aboriginal population in Montreal. (PHOTO BY BOB MESHER/MAKIVIK)

The Makivik Corp. has pledged its continuing support to a project aimed at helping the growing number of

homeless Inuit living in Montreal.

Along with Makivik, a number of organizations, including Montreal's public transit corporation, the Quebec government and a handful of other community organizations, will expand a project to reach out to the itinerant population in the city's urban core.

In 2012, a Montreal social development agency launched its first “service point” at Place-des-Arts metro station, an area frequented by homeless people who use the nearby St. Michael’s Mission drop-in centre.

With the help of Makivik and other organizations, the agency put an outreach worker at the station to provide support and offer referrals to the local homeless population — an estimated 35 per cent of whom are Inuit.

On Dec. 16, the Société de développement social de Ville-Marie announced it will expand that project and now employ three outreach workers to oversee five metro stations in the city.

The expansion will also tailor support to Montreal’s homeless Inuit, a group that comprises about half of the city’s homeless Aboriginal population. The vast majority of those Inuit come from Nunavik; a smaller group comes from the Baffin region.

Robbie Watt, executive assistant to Makivik’s corporate secretary, Andy Moorhouse, spoke on behalf of Moorhouse at the Dec. 16 press conference in Montreal.

While there are many factors that drive Inuit south, Watt said historical traumas and a [housing shortage](#) in the North are largely pushing Inuit out onto the streets.

“Homelessness can either become a norm in our society, or we can ensure it does not become a continuing problem by adequate housing, income, social services and medical care,” Watt said to an audience that included Montreal mayor Denis Coderre.

“If nothing is done we will experience a continuous rise in Inuit homelessness, which will incur further problems, social burdens, and an enormous financial cost for governments.”

Makivik has already pledged \$35,000 to those efforts, money that flows from the Ungaluk Safer Communities fund which underwrites crime-prevention programs and projects for Nunavik.

That’s in addition to other initiatives; Makivik has also funded [two Inuit case workers](#) — one male, one female — to work with the city’s homeless.

Those workers are based out of two Montreal drop-in centres; Chez Doris women’s shelter and Projet Autochtones Québec (PAQ.)

PAQ runs the [only night shelter in Montreal for Aboriginal people](#), making it a focal point for many of the city’s homeless Inuit.

Part of the Dec. 16 announcement includes money to run day programs geared towards the shelter's users.

"We're really trying to invest this money to give people alternatives, but we also want to give them the means to maintain their culture," said Robert Beaudry, project director at the Ville-Marie social development agency. "We want to put more of an emphasis on providing services to the Inuit population."

The shelter, which occasionally holds feasts with seal meat donations, is looking for ways to better access country food.

PAQ is also collaborating with the Montreal Native Friendship Centre for use of its carving room.

Aboriginal education enhancement signed in Courtenay

[HQ Comox Valley](#)

December 16, 2013

Jonathan Szekeres



Aboriginal student success was centre stage at Sid Williams Theatre with the signing of the Comox Valley school district's third Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

These five-year agreements are a commitment by school districts, local Aboriginal communities, and the Ministry of Education to work together to support Aboriginal learners.

Comox Valley MLA Don McRae represented government at this colourful event which featured storytelling, dancing, fiddlers and a poetry reading.

"I know that this third Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement for the Comox Valley will continue the good work being done in support of Aboriginal students," says McRae. "I want to thank all who have worked so hard to create this blueprint for future success."

Today's signing comes after a year of dedicated consultation and dialogue under the direction of the Aboriginal Nations Education Council.

This process brought together the voices of parents, elders, communities and school district staff.

Much progress has been made since the first Agreement was signed.

Six-year completion rates for Aboriginal students in the Comox Valley have risen from 42 per cent to 67 per cent over the last five years.

As well, each spring Aboriginal Curriculum Support Teachers visit each Grade 4 classroom in the district to prepare students for their field trip to the Komoks First Nation Big House which sees 500 students experience First Nation culture and history directly.

There are 1,282 Aboriginal students in the district for 2012-13 making up 13 per cent of the overall student population of 9,877.

At 75 with no English, an Inuk elder takes to Facebook

[CBC News](#)

Dec 18, 2013 1:06 PM CT



Tommy Tatatuapik of Arctic Bay, pictured here with Bertha Piuju Tatatuapik, says he's amazed that information can spread with the click of a mouse, especially since when he grew up on the land, it would take months or even years to contact others. (Facebook)

A 75-year old unilingual Inuk in Nunavut says social media can be great for elders too.

Tommy Tatatuapik is from Arctic Bay.

He recently opened a Facebook account.

"Before I got an account, I use to fear I would break the computer if I press the button," he says.

But Tatatuapik says it was relatively easy to learn once he figured out the basics.



Tatatuapik uses Facebook to post photos, like this one of family members on the land near Arctic Bay. (Facebook)

He says social media is a good way to share information.

He says his list of Facebook friends is growing daily and they're from all over the world

Tatatuapik says he writes in Inuktitut, using the regular alphabet instead of Inuktitut syllabics, and he shares pictures.

He's amazed that information can spread with the click of a mouse, especially since when he grew up on the land, it would take months or even years to contact others.

New U of T teacher program raises aboriginal awareness: U of T's OISE trains teachers to be more aware of how Canada truly treated First Nations, including residential schools

[Toronto Star](#)

December 17, 2013



Cayuga elder Cat Criger shows students at St. Vincent de Paul School a shaker made from a turtle shell. Bernard Weil / Toronto Star Order this photo

Never mind powwows and dream catchers. A Grade 3-4 class in Toronto's west end has had a crash course in the darker moments of Canada's aboriginal history: residential schools, unfair treaties and the so-called [Sixties Scoop](#) of mass adoptions of native children into non-native homes.

It's part of a bold move by the University of Toronto to train teachers to deliver deeper, if sobering, lessons about how this country has treated First Nations people.

"The Sixties Scoop was when aboriginal children were taken to foster homes and got new parents and many of them were like slaves and did all the housework," explained 9-year-old Gaia Hake, whose class at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School has been learning aboriginal history from their student teacher, Sarah Foster, one of 76 enrolled in an [aboriginal specialist program](#) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).

When Foster started teaching the 8- and 9-year-olds this fall, some said they thought aborigines "no longer existed." But after four weeks of Foster's lessons — the kids ended up role-playing parts of the Indian Act — not only were the children outraged, they wanted to take action.

"I felt awful," said 9-year-old Matthew Almasi. "I thought pioneers were helping aborigines but the British and Americans were just trying to take the land. We should do posters to spread awareness.

"I never heard a lot about this until this course and I was surprised aboriginal poverty still exists. We're considered a wealthy country so not many Canadians know this."

The aboriginal program is part of an OISE move to introduce aboriginal culture and history into teacher training, with funding from the [U of T's First Nations House](#). This Deepening Knowledge initiative was guided in part by aboriginal professors from Trent University.

Is it too gritty for children this young? Not at all, argued OISE professor Nancy Steele.

"In order to create compassionate citizens, it's important students know the complexities of situations in the past, and the effect of history on our present-day world," said Steele. "They can't become critical thinkers unless they can see all sides of the situation."

Foster said some parents thanked her for educating their children — and themselves.

"It is heavy material they're learning, but people don't give children the benefit of the doubt," said Foster. "They are able to analyze the information, and it will help them realize why so many aboriginal Canadians live in impoverished conditions."

Yet the new OISE curriculum is not all political horror. Foster invited [Cat Criger](#), a Cayuga elder from the U of T's Mississauga campus and Formula One motorcycle buff who worked in communications for aerospace science, to share some gentle stories about items of cultural importance.

"This eagle feather is like a book; it tells lots of stories," he said. "The spine in the middle is like the path of life, and if you walk off the path, you have to come back down to the point where you strayed. Only when you say 'sorry' can you go back on your path again."

The Toronto Catholic District School Board has begun to focus on aboriginal awareness and conducted its first survey two years ago, asking students if they have aboriginal background, said St. Vincent de Paul principal Krystyna Schneider. Some schools, including hers, discovered aboriginal students they didn't know they had.

"Since then, the board has bought new books and aboriginal music and we've sent teachers for training and brought in aboriginal artists and pow-wow dancers for learning through the arts," she said. "As Canadians, we are all part of this history."

First Nations give Stephen Harper proposal to reform land claims: Senior oversight committee on comprehensive claims concluded its work on Dec. 6

[CBC News](#)

Dec 20, 2013 5:00 AM ET

Susana Mas



B.C. Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould says a committee created after a high-stakes meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and a delegation of First Nations leaders last January has completed its work and is recommending Canada update its policy on comprehensive claims. (Assembly of First Nations)

One of two committees created after a high-stakes meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and a delegation of First Nations leaders last January has completed its work and is recommending Canada update its policy on how it negotiates and resolves disputes over land claims.

"We're recommending to the prime minister that he adopt the principles respecting recognition and reconciliation of Section 35 rights," British Columbia Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould told a group of national chiefs gathered for a bi-annual meeting in Gatineau, Que., last week.

According to the Supreme Court, the principal purpose of Section 35 of the Constitution Act is to fulfil the promise of reconciliation between indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada.

First Nations argue the federal government has not lived up to that promise.

Disputes over land claims arise when aboriginal land rights have not been dealt with by treaties or through other legal means.

Wilson-Raybould and Quebec and Labrador Regional Chief Ghislain Picard met eight times since last February with senior officials from the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council Office and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development before concluding their last meeting on Dec. 6.

Their mandate was to review the federal government's policy on comprehensive land claims and recommend policy changes.

Onus on the prime minister

The senior oversight committee has drafted a list of 10 principles that Canada could adopt "to guide its future engagement with First Nations," Wilson-Raybould told the chiefs.

But Picard, who also gave a presentation to the national chiefs, was critical of the process and what was actually accomplished.

The Quebec and Labrador Regional Chief said what the committee accomplished in eight meetings, could have been done in three.

"The last few months were a good example of how government views high-level meetings, which in many respects are far from what we would have expected," Picard said.

Wilson-Raybould was steadfast in her resolve to reform the government's comprehensive claims policy.

"Whether they listen to us or not, we are going to give them no excuse to say that we didn't try," she said.

"We look to the prime minister to take us up on the solutions that we have put forward to him in order to fundamentally transform the comprehensive claims process."

"We are looking for a solid, political commitment from the prime minister to continue with the work of reforming the comprehensive claims policy," Wilson-Raybould said.

It is unclear at this stage whether the committee's mandate, which expired this month, will be renewed or whether the work will continue in a different form.

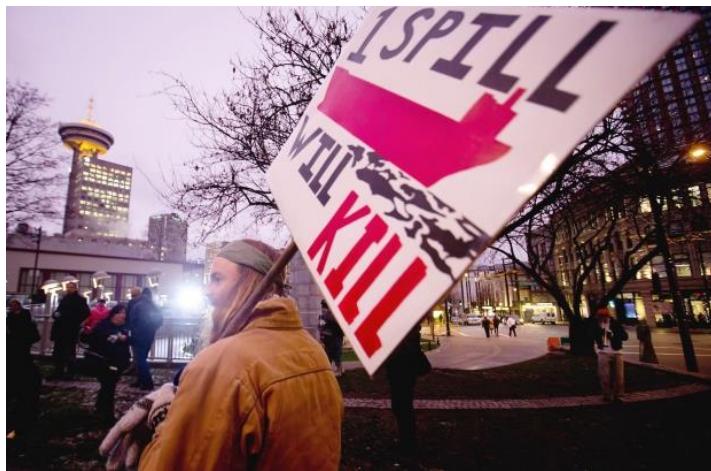
The committee's work follows Harper's promise, in part, to hold [high-level treaty talks](#) on comprehensive land claims with oversight from the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council following the Jan. 11 meeting.

Environmentalists pledge renewed fight to stop Northern Gateway pipeline

[Vancouver Sun](#)

December 19, 2013

Larry Pynn



A protester holds a sign during a demonstration in Vancouver against the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline earlier this year. Photograph by: DARRYL DYCK, THE CANADIAN PRESS

dollar proposal.

Environmentalists reacted Thursday to the National Energy Board recommendation to conditionally approve the Enbridge Northern Gateway project by promising to continue and even build on their opposition to the multi-billion-

"We are disappointed with the NEB's decision, but this is far from the end of the story," said Ben West, a campaign director for ForestEthics Advocacy. "Really, what happened today was more like throwing fuel on a fire."

"Opposition to this project is widespread and passionate," West said. "This NEB decision will only anger British Columbians and inspire more people to get involved, to make sure this project isn't built."

ForestEthics said that 1,161 people spoke publicly at community hearings during the consultation process, and all but two of them were opposed to Enbridge's plans.

"It's too bad that in this decision oil interests trumped science, facts, and powerful opposition" to the project, said Nikki Skuce, ForestEthics' senior energy campaigner.

Mike Hudema, a climate and energy campaigner with Greenpeace, said that "the unbroken wall of opposition to this toxic project remains united. Together we will do what it takes, from court cases to civil disobedience, to ensure this pipeline never gets built."

Sierra Club BC campaigns director Caitlyn Vernon said the decision demonstrated a “shocking disregard” for the views expressed by British Columbians, and for the evidence from a Joint Review Panel that investigated the Enbridge proposal.

“Today’s announcement does not mean that this pipeline and tanker proposal has been approved,” Vernon said. “The federal cabinet needs First Nations’ approval and social license from British Columbians, and they have neither. British Columbians have made it clear that we don’t want tar sands pipelines or tankers putting salmon, jobs and communities at risk of oil spills.”

David Miller, president and CEO of WWF-Canada, said British Columbians clearly expressed their opposition to the project, but that the panel wasn’t listening. He said the presence of up to 220 supertankers per year is a “threat to coastal communities, species and ecosystems. One major oil spill would destroy the results of decades of conservation work in the region.”

The Raincoast Conservation Foundation also expressed disappointment that special interests prevailed over the public will.

“We were hoping the NEB had heard the concerns of British Columbians, but obviously political and corporate oil agendas supersede the interests of the citizenry,” said Misty MacDuffee, a Raincoast biologist. “I guess we shouldn’t be surprised when a pipeline most British Columbians don’t want is given the thumbs up.”

The National Energy Board put 209 conditions on its recommendation that Enbridge could build the Northern Gateway pipeline project. Here are 10 of the most important:

- Develop a marine mammal protection plan for construction and operation that includes mitigation and monitoring, including reporting of any mammals killed or injured.
- Measures to offset impacts on caribou, including quantifying the amount of habitat directly and indirectly affected, and preparing a caribou habitat restoration plan.
- Develop a training and education plan to assist in aboriginal, local and regional participation in the project.
- Carry \$950 million in spill-insurance coverage, including access to \$100 million within the first 10 days of any accident.
- Put into effect its promised enhanced tanker safety plan, which includes the use of two tugs to escort tankers, a new advanced radar system, and increased emergency-response systems.

- Take aboriginal traditional knowledge and land-use into consideration during development of the project.
- Research programs into oil-spill cleanup and the varying physical and chemical properties of the oil intended to be shipped, including studies into dispersion and remediation.
- Conduct pre-operations emergency response exercises and develop an emergency preparedness and response exercise and training program.
- Provide notification of any plan to use Temporary Foreign Workers during project construction.
- A wetland assessment plan that identifies the presence and distribution of wildlife species at risk.
- Develop an air-quality emissions management and soil monitoring plan for the Kitimat Terminal.
- Conduct various pipeline inspections within six months and two years, which include an ultrasonic crack detection inspection.

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Ojibway former child sex worker says striking down prostitution laws does nothing to help Aboriginal women

[APTN National News](#)

December 20, 2013

Kenneth Jackson

OTTAWA- Some celebrated Friday after the Supreme Court struck down Canada's prostitution laws as unconstitutional.

But one Ojibway former child sex worker cried.

And they weren't tears of joy.

"It feels as a survivor, someone commercially and sexually exploited, that it's a slap in the face. A big slap in the face," said Bridget Perrier, 37, a former child sex worker who was first [sold to men in Thunder Bay at the age of 12](#). "We can't put dollars signs on our bodies."

The Supreme Court of Canada unanimously agreed the current prostitution laws in Canada are unconstitutional and has given the federal government a year to come up with something better. The current laws will remain in place until then.

Perrier feels the ruling is a step towards giving men the right to further victimize Aboriginal women and girls who, she says, turn to the sex trade when they no longer have hope.

"Sex is an honour, so why are our girls being dishonoured? They're being dishonoured when we're finding them in dumpsters, they're being dishonoured when they're standing on a street corner in minus 35 degree weather," she said.

Perrier now runs Sextrade 101, a victim advocacy group in Toronto that aims to help Aboriginal women and girls get out of the sex trade. She says making prostitution legal doesn't protect vulnerable Aboriginal women and girls.

She believes they're more vulnerable in society due to centuries of colonialism, particularly Indian Residential Schools that traumatized Indigenous people when the government forcibly removed children and put them in state-run schools where many died, were sexually assaulted and beaten for speaking their language.

The last school closed in 1996.

But many people don't agree with Perrier. They say the current laws make it less safe for women by making them quietly service clients by putting them in unsafe conditions to avoid police.

Prostitution was never illegal in Canada, but living off the avails of prostitution, communicating for the purpose and operating a brothel are.

APTN National News interviewed one man in Ottawa that is known as a "hobbyist," a person who pays sex trade workers for sex.

The man, who didn't want to be named, said he thinks striking down the laws will make women safer.

"I think it's great news and rather progressive thinking on the part of the court. Many (service providers) are vulnerable, this ruling provides some support," he said. "If only the laws were different dating back so many years Ottawa wouldn't have all these unsolved prostitute murders still on the books."

The murders he's referring to are mainly women who worked on the street, the bottom of the sex trade world in the city. Many are addicted to drugs.

Men "cruise" the streets looking for them and can have sexual services provided for as little as \$20.

There's an Internet site where the men trade tips about where the girls are in Ottawa, especially where police are and how to avoid them.

"I don't support street prostitution or trafficking for that matter," he said, adding, he does support the girls on the street though. "(I) think the laws should focus on cleaning those aspects up and empowering women to do what they want, if they want, with their bodies."

But the ruling does allow for debate and coming up with a better solution, said MP Joy Smith.

"Despite this ruling, the debate around prostitution is hardly settled," Smith said in a statement. "There are those who wish to legalize and normalize the industry, those who wish to criminalize all aspects of the industry, and finally those, like myself, who recognize prostitution as an industry that is inherently harmful to women and girls and therefore must be eliminated."

She like, Perrier, supports the Nordic model where countries such as Sweden criminalize the people who pay for sex and not the provider.

"The Nordic model of prostitution is effective due to its three approaches: explicitly criminalizing the purchase of sexual services, a national awareness campaign to educate the public that the purchase of sexual services is harmful to women, and finally strong support programs for those who seek to exit prostitution," said Smith.

Prostitution is legal in countries like New Zealand where, since 2003, governments legislate the sex trade, including zoning and licensing brothels.

If the feds do make changes that is the avenue they should follow as the Nordic model still finds someone guilty said the man who frequents local escorts.

"It's just as flawed as it still has a criminal element. It really offers no protection for the providers. Make it legal, legislate it like in New Zealand," he said.

The federal government said they'll review the ruling.